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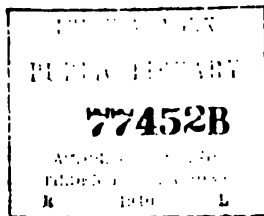
"Tis all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days,
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays:
Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,
And one by one back in the closet lays.

Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam



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BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

In this present life there is a boundary set before our feet, and, should we seek to pass beyond, then shall we encounter destruction of the mind and of the body.

I

OF course, the truth of this story may be questioned; but that is a possibility which many writers and most conversationalists are in the habit of facing with a courage born, perhaps, of despair.

Now, I happen to be just a plain business man of the most ordinary type, and, as I am neither golfer nor fisherman in my leisure — nor, indeed, inclined to sport of any description — I am less tempted to falsehood than most men.

I first knew Alec Gilray in college days, and I will have little need to describe him to you, for you must be familiar with his kind: the eager, earnest young Scot with iron health and of an austere up-bringing. But there was something about him that attracted me from the first, and we became great friends.

Unlike most of us, he had none of the ambitions natural to his age, confessing that his one wish was first the attainment of some position that would please the "old people at the Manse," and that would bring in enough to repay the stinting that had given him his education; and then — to read, read, read! I never saw such a bookworm; it seemed as though he had been starved all his life — as far as reading was concerned — and that he was ravenous from a kind of brain hunger.

I gathered that the Manse was chiefly provided with religious literature, and that the study even of this was circumscribed.

As a natural consequence, Alec as a boy had nothing to feed his mind upon but his own thoughts until he left home; and, in early youth, thoughts are apt to assume the character of dreams and vague, bewildering theories.

As soon as he found himself free amongst the world of books the dreams were thrust aside, but their memory remained to exert an influence upon his after life of which he himself was unconscious. The theories still occupied his brain: to be wrestled with and proved, or else cast out. Thus, after the first year of omnivorous reading, Alec began to specialise in his studies.

Most of us had a Celtic weakness — if, indeed, it be a weakness — for poetry; but his choice lay with the poetry that sings of mysteries and uncanny hap-

penings (such as Christobel), just as in prose he devoured everything he could find about the transmigration of souls, and psychology, and the strange beliefs of the East.

With all this we, his companions, had but little sympathy. There was so much to learn and to enjoy for us who stood, as it were, upon the threshold of life, that we had no patience for what lurked in the shadows beyond our ken.

These were studies of which his parents would be scarcely inclined to approve, and Alec was careful that they should remain in ignorance of the manner in which he spent his spare time during those college days.

When these were ended our ways divided; for he passed into the Civil Service, while I was put into the office of Messrs. Haman and Company, merchants.

He went out to take up an appointment in India, and I — wrestling with accounts at a desk in the City of London — would think sometimes of Gilray dreaming amidst the romance of the East, with whose prosaic imports my whole existence was concerned. Upon the other hand, I must confess that the larger portion of my thoughts were occupied with Gilray's pretty cousin Jeannie, up at home in Scotland. Occasionally I heard from him; once or twice I sent him books by his request, which were invariably concerned with what, in the old days, we were

used to call "Alec's nonsense"; and I learnt that he was moved from one post to another equally solitary and unhealthy.

After intermittent attacks both of fever and of home-sickness, he seemed to grow accustomed to his new life, and even content in his exile.

Once only he returned on leave, and immediately surrounded himself with all manner of cranks — such as mediums, many-coloured Oriental students, and what not. It seemed that I had only seen him once or twice before he was gone again.

Meanwhile, time passed, and my affairs, dull and uninteresting as they were, had prospered exceedingly, so that I had been enabled, quite a while since, to go home and fetch Jeannie, who had waited for me up in the North.

Our first great stroke of luck came when the firm sent me to Bombay upon some business to their branch house there, and offered my wife a free passage on one of their ships; so that we set forth as though upon a deferred wedding journey.

As soon as we landed we had a letter from Alec asking us up-country to stay with him, and when my errand was accomplished we started on what would be, of necessity, in the nature of a flying visit.

I cannot say that I was very much taken up with his place of abode. Adipúr was a combination of swamp and mud flat. Upon the latter was a dirty

little village, Alec's bungalow, and his office. The surrounding country was bare and ugly save where, in the distance, you saw the outer fringe of the jungle. Jeannie was not a little nervous at the thought of possible visits from wild beasts and reptiles, but Alec's warm welcome made her drive her fears into the background and resolve to wear a courage which she did not altogether feel.

Until now we had had no hint of the dim, brooding mystery that is India, and which one does not notice amidst the bustle and life of the great city in which we had hitherto spent our time. Now it was as though we had been dropped suddenly into a new world — a world which held its breath over some dark and terrible secret. The silence, the noiseless tread of the natives, the gloom of the distant jungle, resembling, to my fancy, nothing so much as a line of bristling spears, all ministered to this curious sensation. It was as though you were always watching and waiting for something to happen. Alec seemed not only unconscious of any feelings of this kind, but was evidently quite happy, for his face wore what I can best describe as an expression of eager content, as though he was for ever pursuing dreams or ideals, and finding in such a pursuit both encouragement and peace.

Upon that first evening we spoke only of home, as we sat in the veranda, looking out upon the darkness that glittered with brilliant stars.

At first we were silent, and then I asked him if he did not feel terribly home-sick sometimes; and then he began to talk in the low voice of one who is accustomed to speaking with himself alone.

"At first, before I learnt, I used to be wearying always for home. They say that folks from Scotland travel farther and oftener than any other nation. All the same, I think that the home-sickness is harder upon us than on any other people. The only remedy is to train yourself so that you can banish your surroundings entirely, and literally see before you what your heart is wishing for. It is no good trying to stifle thoughts of home—you must be able to *bring home to you*, so actually that you see it before you at will, without even shutting your eyes."

There was a pause, and then he continued leaning forward into the darkness with the air of one who literally watched everything that he described:

"I can see the long, yellow hills of home, and the teams ploughing upon the slopes, followed by a flashing trail of white seabirds. I can hear the creak and jingle of the lorries as they journey all day to and fro along the grey highway that runs between the hills and the sea. I always think of our sea as a dancer fair and smiling and tripping softly away on twinkling feet, so light and swift that you do not notice she is gone until you find yourself alone on the sands at sunset."

"But, Alec, the tide turns at a different time every day," broke in the practical Jeannie, who had drawn forth some knitting even here, and whose little fingers moved swiftly in the darkness. Alec laughed at the interruption, and at the homely clicking of the pins, but I noticed that he did not shift his eyes, and that he still gazed straight out in front of him.

"My dear," he said, "to me it always turns with the sunset, just when the red light catches the trunks of the fir trees — you mind where they grow down to the edge of the shore, just as though they loved the water?"

"Oh, I mind," replied Jeannie briefly.

"And then, with the dusk, the lights begin — red on Burntisland and white on Inchkeith, and far away out on the skyline Inverkeithing that glitters like a yellow crown. I can hear the gulls calling out of the dusk, and the haunting pipe of the curlew, and the little shivering cry of the sea swallows as the night steals towards us from the waters. No black blanket like it is here, but a friendly darkness all fresh from the taste of the salt air and alive with the swirl of leaves that follow after you like fairies' footsteps."

The knitting stopped suddenly, and a little hand stole into mine, while Jeannie's voice exclaimed, with a break in it: "Alec, whisht!"

"I'm sorry," Alec answered, with a start as

though he awoke from a dream. "There am I tiring you to death, and you coming all this way to take pity on me!"

"It is not that," she replied. "It is not that — only you bring it all back; and, oh! it is all so far now — more than five thousand miles away."

II

There is nothing to record about that visit, for we could but stay two days in all. Of Alec's existence there did not seem much to learn. Work — a dull, official routine — occupied him for a certain fixed time; the rest of his life was spent, he told me, in his study at the back of his office — a little building standing at the farther end of the compound.

This room was crowded with books: in shelves, on tables, and in dusty heaps about the floor.

It was not uncomfortable, and I could understand his wishing to get away to his reading, for there seemed nothing else for him to do, since the chance of getting some big-game shooting — which, in the eyes of many men, would have provided the only redeeming feature to Adipúr — offered no attractions to Gilray, who disapproved of taking life.

"You will laugh," he said, as he told me of this fad, "and you will call it part of my nonsense, but thank goodness I had that nonsense to save me, or

I should have lived in hell all these years. Now that I have learnt ——”

Here he stopped, and I could get nothing further out of him. Nevertheless, those last words of his stuck in my mind, and I could make nothing of them. Before we left I had noticed something else. In the old days Alec's reading had not left him careless of contemporary affairs, while there were few people who held their own better in our debating societies or in the long arguments over the fire, that are so dear to the Scottish heart. Now all this was gone; even the newspaper, so precious to the exile in however old and battered a condition it may arrive, had no attention from him at all. He now showed the most profound indifference to the world outside, and manifested no wish to hear news, although, as I have already said, his demeanour entirely dispelled any idea of mental apathy. He had seemed really pleased to see us, and it was a relief to Jeannie that, amidst this lonely and unnatural existence,¹ he should possess some secret comfort and refreshment, although she failed to comprehend the lack of emotion with which he received her account of the unfortunate dissensions at that time disturbing members of the Established Kirk throughout our native land. Finally she came to the conclusion — in the course of our dusty jour-

¹ A bachelor's existence is always an unnatural one in Jeannie's opinion.

ney back to Bombay — that this secret comfort was of a philosophical nature.

“For one thing,” she reasoned, “did you ever see such a lot of books? Just accumulations of dust, to my thinking! And in such queer languages too — he talks Hindustani like a native, and all kinds of strange tongues.

“He said to me yesterday: ‘I used to think that life was all “up and doing,” but I changed about that long ago. Our bodies are given us as a hindrance, not as a help to understanding, and all that happens around us is just as a shadow upon glass. All our life is inside us, everything else is a husk, which we will shed some day.’

“I told him that I had no fearful longing to shed mine. Upon that he burst out laughing like he used to do, and said, ‘Well, we must all go our own ways after contentment. Your happiness lies with Hughie, and mine is in my “nonsense,” as he calls it. So we will just need to leave it at that.’”

And when we arrived in Bombay we received news that put even Alec out of our heads altogether for the moment. It appeared that the firm had a sudden vacancy in the Bombay business. The junior partner there, having come into some money, had had enough of the East, and was for retiring and going home immediately, and they offered me his place!

The world seemed going round and round as

I received this great piece of intelligence, and you may be sure that I lost no time in accepting whenever my wits had returned to me.

Alec was delighted, too, and besought us not to forget him in our new glory, but to come out and visit him in the wilderness. I went again upon the first chance I had, but nothing would induce me to take Jeannie. I could not repress a feeling of anxiety about him, although there seemed to be no cause for this. In official circles he was very well considered, and there was every hope of his being offered a better and less isolated job in the near future.

When I arrived I found even less ground for disquietude, and was inclined to laugh at myself for being like some nervous old wife about my friend.

For he was full of the old cheerful content with his surroundings. He said that it would be just the same to him wherever he might be, provided always that he remained away from the bustle and worry of towns.

I had picked up a little of the language by now, and I learnt from Jumàn, the native bearer, that all the natives looked upon Alec with reverence as a very holy man. This rather surprised me, and I am convinced that he himself was supremely unconscious of their attitude towards him. He was busy reading, as usual, having recently returned from Euro-

pean leave with a whole box of books bearing on hypnotism and psychic influences and such like.

He seemed to like having me to talk with him, although my utter ignorance upon his favourite subjects made the simplest word and most elementary explanations always essential.

In appearance he was thinner than ever, but enjoyed apparently excellent health upon a meagre diet mostly consisting of bread and water, and I noticed more than ever his eagerness about abstract speculation, and his complete severance from all outer practical interests.

I had extracted his solemn promise never to attempt any hypnotic experiments upon me, and he had laughingly added that he was only a beginner — a statement which a subsequent occurrence led me to disbelieve.

It was upon the last morning of my stay, and we were sitting at breakfast, when a native sent to ask for an interview with Alec.

Upon entering, he besought his help. He said that the panther which had been seen several times near the village had come down to the rice-fields, and had taken his child from where it lay on the ground while the parents worked near by.

This had happened about ten days ago, and the mother, haunted by the terrible scene which had taken place under her very eyes, had given way so

completely under her grief that they feared she would go mad.

Would the sahib deign to arise and kill the panther, so that his wife should again be at peace.

The train of reasoning was a little difficult to understand, and, in any case, it served only to annoy Alec, who replied abruptly that he absolutely refused to kill the panther, but that the woman was to be brought before him immediately.

"Are you going to try your black magic upon her?" I asked lightly, although I must confess that the complete indifference with which he treated the whole incident struck me rather unpleasantly.

"Well, Hughie, I am thinking that it would be a fine thing if my 'nonsense' brought peace to some poor soul, but I cannot say if I will be able to work it."

The miserable creature squatted abjectly before us, her face blank with despair, and then Alec began speaking rapidly, and in a low voice that seemed to vibrate through the room — for the scene took place in the "study," which has been already described.

I noticed that his eyes had fixed and that his eyelids drooped slightly, so that his gaze narrowed. It seemed as though he caught and held her whole being with the intensity of his purpose. He spoke to her in her own dialect, but I was able to gather the drift of his words. To my stupefaction, he was

telling her over and over again that she had imagined the whole scene—or, rather, that, the baby having died of fever, evil spirits had sent this vision to torment her while she had lain stricken with grief.

I do not know for how long he continued speaking. I only know that I remained fascinated by that quiet and *live* voice repeating the same message, until gradually the horror faded from the woman's eyes, and then he ended by commanding her to sleep—"to sleep and forget." Immediately her head bowed on her hands as she crouched there, and in a few minutes she was sleeping peacefully.

Alec rose and whispered directions to the man who waited outside. He was to lift her up and to take her home, and when she awoke she would have completely forgotten the real circumstances of the child's death. He was charged, under pain of the most blood-curdling, supernatural visitations, never to speak of the panther in her presence.

When she had gone I noticed that Alec was white and trembling, as though after some tremendous exertion.

We promised, before I started upon the return journey, that we would write to each other, but his letters were unlike himself and destitute of interest. They merely contained inquiries after ourselves and mentioned his daily work, apologising for the want of news. They might as well have been written by

someone else. Then, just before my next visit, I learnt with amazement — through the same channel whence I had heard official praise of him — that he had refused promotion, preferring to remain where he was.

You will have had to work your way up in the world from junior clerk to junior partner before you can realise the amazement with which I was filled by those two words, "refused promotion"! I suspected that the solitary life and his strange studies had driven him mad, and, refraining from communicating my anxiety to Jeannie, I hurried on my departure as much as possible.

Alec was out when I arrived, but his old servant welcomed me with evident relief. I saw that he was longing and yet terrified to speak, and when at last my patience and powers of persuasion had been taxed to the utmost, what I gathered was strange enough.

The sahib, I learnt, had mastered all the science and learning in the world, which seemed to be a sweeping statement. He could charm wild beasts, and cast a spell over all the powers of good and evil, but he was no longer entirely holy, for had he not a female spirit shut within the private study?

I could hardly refrain from smiling at the anticlimax. But I was assured that this was so, and that he spent the midnight hours in her company. Also — and this was more disquieting — the hus-

band of the woman whom the sahib had bewitched, so that she awoke without memory, was furious. He considered his wife's recovery to be unnatural, and that he could not forgive Alec for not killing the panther. He was a hillman, and therefore Jumàn suspected him and feared some sinister attack upon his master.

Hardly had he finished speaking when Alec appeared upon the scene. I caught the furtive look with which the bearer greeted his approach, and also remarked that he was as unconscious of the new fear as he had been of the old reverence. I thought him — outwardly, at least — very much changed. His face was paler and more set, as though by an overmastering resolve; his eyes, formerly so smiling and cheerful, looked feverishly bright, and his bearing had something hard, almost cruel, about it, as if he was so entirely eaten up with some great idea that nothing in this world was to be regarded or suffered to interfere with his purpose.

At the same time he walked with the quick confidence of one who has made some great discovery, or who stands now within a stone's throw of his goal.

I regretted the old cheerful content of the philosopher, and felt that this new mood boded no good. His spirit burnt like a flame, where before it had shone like a star.

What could have made the change?

Of course he saw and understood my stare, for he laughed, and said in a strange voice:

"What is it that surprises you about me?"

"Everything," I answered. "You are a new man. You look as though——" And then a thought struck me. "Can you be in love?"

"Do I look as you and Jeannie looked when you walked along the shore towards the Coble, and I caught you hand in hand together, just at the corner where the eagle is carved on the rock?" He paused, and then said: "And why would I not be in love? Do you hold the monopoly of the emotions? In any case, I should choose a new way of love."

"Never a better," I told him, and then I looked at him curiously, for I saw that he was keeping back something that was on his tongue.

He said no more at that time. After dinner we went across into his sitting-room, and as we passed out into the compound I was surprised to see a goat tied to the far end of the balustrade, for I knew that Alec had never liked animals about the place; he always thought that they would be neglected when he was lost in his books.

At the door I started back, for an odd, faint smell lingered about the room, reminding me of something to which I could not put a name, until I remembered suddenly the New Year's circus at home in the days of my childhood.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Surely you do not keep wild beasts here? And what has happened to the watchman?"

Alec laughed.

"You little guess what progress I have made in my 'nonsense' since you were last at ——," he said. "Yes, wild beasts, as you call them, have visited me here. The watchman"—here he hesitated—"is ill, and it was not worth while getting another for the few days that he will be away. The place is so quiet."

He was by the table as he spoke, and I close to the window; and suddenly, as we sat there, with the lamp between us, I saw two yellow eyes blaze at me out of the darkness; then there came a long, low whine, and hot breath fanned my face.

We were, of course, quite unarmed, and in that ghastly moment I felt my blood give a sudden leap and then turn to ice within my veins.

To my horror, Alec turned out the lamp as he sprang beside me, giving a queer, moaning whistle as he looked back fearlessly into those ghastly, staring eyes.

For a moment they stood thus — Alec and the unknown visitant; then the eyes grew gradually smaller, and still smaller, as though in retreat, and I heard something swish in the darkness; a soft thud, and then all was silence. Alec turned on the lamp again, and as he did this I felt something trickle down my

face, and was ashamed to realise that it was the cold sweat of deadly fear.

When the light fell upon Alec's features I saw that they were working with excitement. Then the silence broke, for he began to stammer forth apologies. I remember noticing how oddly his voice sounded on the tense stillness. He explained that he had been occupying his leisure with experiments in taming various animals and that he was meeting with some success. As he stopped he bent forward as if listening; and, at that moment, I heard a sudden scream coming as though from the end of the compound.

"What is that?" I asked. To my surprise, Alec smiled and answered casually:

"Oh, one of those beastly jungle noises; I expect your nerves are upset. It was stupid of me not to think of it."

"Of what?"

"Of shutting the window, I suppose," he replied, although I was certain that this was not what he had meant to say.

"And now let us go back; you are dead beat after the hot journey. If you hear footsteps after you are in bed, you need not be surprised; I go to rest rather late."

I confess that I did not particularly enjoy crossing the compound back to the bungalow; we walked in silence, and, although my host accompanied me, I

found no chance of questioning him as to the nature of our would-be visitor, for he only walked back as far as the door of my room, and afterwards I could have sworn to hearing that low whistle again.

The next morning I was inclined to be even more ashamed of my last night's alarms. Of course, the brute, whatever it was, had been probably already half-tamed by Alec, and, although I deeply regretted his new fad for keeping this kind of pet, I felt that my fright was ridiculous. All the same I could see no cage nor indeed any signs of a living creature; when I went out and looked round, even the goat had vanished.

I sat lazily on the veranda alone; when Alec joined me he was pale and listless, but responded eagerly when I began to question him upon the subject of his hypnotic experiments.

"Yes, in Scotland they would call it irreligious," he agreed; "but, then, I cannot understand what in Scotland and all over Europe is called religion. I always hold that a man may not believe what he will, but only what he *must*; and my mental digestion is delicate, I suppose, for I find that I cannot assimilate the whole of any creed, and so I must needs take a little here and a little there to make up my allowance."

"What a jumble you must be in!" I exclaimed, scandalised.

"Yes; but it is a good beginning; of course, the

study of it demands one's whole life; but, then, for what else is life given one?"

"The religion of our fathers is enough for me," said I; "and does your study give you real comfort? You do not really seek to believe, but only to understand."

"But I cannot believe unless I understand," he answered.

"Then I think that you are putting your intellect to a very considerable strain," I observed.

He laughed rather grimly, and said:

"I will show you something." And walking out from the shade of the veranda, he gave a long-drawn cry. There was a silence — the silence of an Indian morning when the parched land is being further scorched by the sun.

Then again he sent the cry skimming forth into space. A little black moving speck broke the yellow monotony of the mudflats, then another, and yet another; and Alec said, without turning his eyes: "Do not move when they come; keep perfectly quiet." I was fascinated by those strange black specks advancing with a curious awkward gait, half hopping, half shuffle.

It was not, however, until they had come quite near that I saw they were particularly revolting specimens of a large monkey.

The uncanny thing about the whole scene was their absolute silence; they approached as though upon

wires, and I cannot describe to you the queer creepy look it had to watch the brutes slinking up to Alec in absolute stillness. They crouched in front of him, their evil beady eyes leering up into his face, and their degraded ape faces working and contorted but making no sound. It was as though they were there in spite of or unknown to themselves. He stood looking down on them, and speaking in the same curious voice as that in which he had addressed the native woman a year ago.

This time I did not catch what he said; but I could bear it no longer. What he was going to do with them I cannot imagine, but a blind, unreasoning rage seized me in face of the repulsive creatures mouthing and crawling round my friend, and I sprang to my feet. Instantly the spell was broken and they had scattered screaming and chattering whence they came.

I had never seen Gilray angry before; he turned on me a face white with passion.

"I cannot help it," I said stubbornly; "this is past a joke, Alec. You may call it hypnotism, or what you will. I call it a Godless abomination! On my first visit I found you happy enough with your studies and your philosophy. Then, last year, this magic had begun to enter your brain, and although you employed it for good, I warned you then."

He controlled himself with an effort, and said coldly:

"The end justified the means."

"You know that is not true!" I exclaimed; "this solitary, unnatural life has turned your brain. You have absorbed yourself so completely in the inner life and so forth that you notice nothing else. Your servants look upon you with terror; I myself see that you are completely changed. After these years of study which were supposed to guide you higher and higher, you suddenly devote yourself to the cultivation of unnatural powers, about which there is something horrible. It is not sympathy you have with these creatures; it is some terrible and magic hold upon them. And how will it all end? Do you expect your influence to last indefinitely? Do you suppose they like being constrained to do your bidding?"

"Listen!" said Alec gently. "Come away in out of the sun, and we will talk this over together."

My heart softened as I saw how tired he looked, and I began:

"I am sorry that I spoilt your experiment, but see how I am placed; and I should be indeed a false friend if I stood by and said nothing while you are ruining your career and persisting in staying on in this mud hole!"

"My dear Hughie," he replied affectionately, "you know that 'a career' means nothing to me. I do my work as well as I can, and the money it brings in goes home for the most part, and the rest is spent with the booksellers."

"But you cannot remain here for ever," I protested.

"Such is my hope," and he spoke with an odd emphasis.

Of course there was something behind all this; but Alec Gilray was ever an elusive creature to question. I determined upon my line of action.

"Well, Alec," I remarked, "I must be thinking of going home."

"Home!" he exclaimed in surprise.

"I mean back to Bombay."

"But you have hardly arrived yet. Do you know that you are the only white man I ever see?"

"That is your own fault entirely. I have come to the conclusion that I cannot help you in any way by remaining. And as I cannot persuade you to leave this cursed place, there is nothing left for me to do but to return where my business awaits me."

Then he broke forth into earnest entreaty that I should stay, and not only the affection in his voice but the expression of his whole face convinced me of the sincerity with which he spoke.

When I had agreed to remain a day or two longer he began talking about his ideas again; this time of his own free will.

"My dear Alec," I said — he having urged me to speak my mind — "nothing will convince me but that what we called your nonsense in the old days has become dangerous nonsense now."

"Well, they say that there is no pleasure without danger," he replied. "But I can assure you that there is very little here. You remember that I told you I could not believe where I did not understand? I have always felt that, ever since I first began to read and to worry about things. As I thought more and more I became convinced that what I call '*me*' is my spirit which is immortal — that all the rest (character, inclinations, and the complex paraphernalia of the mind due to heredity and education and circumstances — cast away when death claims the body) can be 'sloughed' while yet we remain in this particular life; so that the spirit can stand apart, as it were, from all of these, and survey the outer life and the body in which that spirit is ordered to dwell for a space. (Of course, all this is as old as the hills, only, as you know, I never can accept the teaching of others; I must always plod along until I have discovered things for myself.) Well, having got so far, I now threw overboard all the superfluity for which I had no use — character, tastes, inclinations; if one has no outer life, one has no need for any of these. Now there remains the will. Will power is a primitive naked force in itself, and I believed that its possibilities were unlimited. Our wills are smothered by laws and conventions and rubbish of all kinds, or else weakened by the indulgence of the senses. Of course, I had got rid of all these hindrances."

"But then," I interrupted, "how about original sin?"—a subject overshadowing all others in importance from the educational point of view in which we had both been reared.

"Sin belongs to the body, and with that we have nothing more to do. I grant that there is a mental element in sensuality, but then, in the process of proving the separateness and individuality of the spirit, one had to sweep and garnish one's mind."

"And the seven devils entered in," I quoted softly, but he did not hear.

"To continue: I found that I had first to develop my will power, and then discipline it by various exercises. I made myself do things that I hated, or that were ridiculous, and against which my will rebelled, and which nevertheless I forced it to perform. I also practised concentration until it had reached a degree hitherto unguessed at by me. I could concentrate and keep my will power entirely upon some given object for any definite period; as long or as short as I chose. I realised that I made gradual but steady progress—'I' meaning, of course, the controlling spirit.

"Now we come to the so-called hypnotism! Through the habit of concentration and the continual practice of mental exercises I obtained gradually the complete control that I had planned; you remember the night of your first visit here? Jean-

nie thought that I was merely indulging in sentimental reminiscence, but I think that *you* realised that I simply and actually *saw* what I described. This was one of my first exercises of concentration — i.e. will discipline.

“That is why I lost — long ago — any wish to leave this place, since at any moment I can bring before me the country that I love.

“The fringe of jungle, the ugly swamp, the gloom and monotony that you hate have no existence for me. I never even see them!

“Well, as my control developed, I was able to pursue the doctrine of the Transmigration of Souls, in which, as you know, I have always been a firm believer (substituting, by the by, ‘spirits’ for ‘soul’). That ‘souls,’ or ‘spirits’ as I prefer to call them, slip into other bodies has always seemed to me a matter of course. There are good and evil spirits, or, again, spirits who are neither good nor evil, but imprisoned perhaps all the same in some terrible form. I simply pit my will against theirs; dominating them by the use of a weapon which for years has been continuously sharpened and prepared for the encounter.”

“And if you meet a superior will?” I asked in spite of myself.

“A stronger will would not belong to a spirit condemned to live in the body of an animal.”

"Then you hypnotise or dominate them secure in the knowledge that so long as your spirit commands your will absolutely ——"

"Yes, and one must never let the will waver — lose control or 'let go,' so to speak, of the will and power of concentration. Control, however, becomes a habit when it is continuously exercised, just as a man, constantly in the saddle, is hardly likely to fall off suddenly: he has the same power over his horse as I hold over my will."

"The horse may fail him," I urged.

"As we agreed, there is a risk in everything, but in this case the risk becomes smaller and smaller every day, until it will finally vanish."

"And you think that you speak to a spirit when you hypnotise a monkey?" I asked.

"First you dominate the will, and then, when you have the subject entirely under control, you try and awake the spirit. Those monkeys you saw had no idea that they ever left the jungle until you 'woke' them. I have not yet actually reached the spirit, except in one instance. What should you say if I told you that I had found the spirit of a woman imprisoned in ——"

"Alec," I said solemnly, in a state of complete wilderment, "I should affirm that you have seen the face of the sun. For heaven's sake go home to-night, to-morrow day, and find some decent lass with a human soul in an ordinary body."

Alec burst out here into a kind of shrill laugh, so that I supposed I had amused his ascetic notions, and then :

"Ah, Hughie! I had sooner preach to the Eagle Rock than try and convince you against your will."

"But you cannot understand," I broke in. "You cast off the old beliefs, and what have you in exchange? A pack of theories — a lot of heathenish folly! You are wearing out mind and body in the pursuit of shadows, and worse than shadows; and you are pitting your single judgment against the wisdom of the ages."

"You should have tried for the ministry, Hughie," he answered, in no way affronted. "But — well, I wonder ——" He went off with his sentence unfinished.

The rest of the day passed quietly. He was at his "work" and I at mine, for I had brought plenty of letters and papers to occupy my attention and to save time against my return. At dinner I asked him what had become of the native woman who had been the subject of that strange demonstration the year before.

"She," he replied, delivered in the tone he would use in speaking

of the fact that the panther has been without scruples about taking her prey," he exclaimed sharply :

"If I could only make you understand! Why, I would have much rather have killed the child, if I had to take my choice."

I gasped.

"Surely you must realise that, in an infant, the spirit is practically non-existent. It is as undeveloped as its body. Whereas a spirit, whether good or evil, imprisoned in the form of an animal is full grown. You could not release it by killing the animal's body, because it would be sent to another prison — possibly lower still in the animal scale. You would have helped to condemn it perhaps to still more cruel suffering. It would be ten times worse than murder."

I found myself looking at my friend with loathing.

"In fact, you would sacrifice anything to the subject of your experiment of the moment?"

"Anything," he answered calmly; and I realised for the first time that he looked positively inhuman. I could have almost wished for some sign of ordinary vulgar brutality; there was something infinitely worse in this frozen intensity of purpose. Of course, if he really thought that he was going to free imprisoned spirits, there might be some excuse for his interference in the black arts; but if he thought any such thing, he must be, as I feared, already insane.

After dinner he made no suggestion that we should

go across to the study, but sat quietly talking of old days on the veranda until very late.

When I got to my room, I could not sleep — until an hour or two had passed — for thinking of the disquieting situation. Then I awoke suddenly, and, toss about as I would, I could not get rid of a most disagreeable foreboding that something was threatening Alec.

At last I could bear it no longer and, putting on my clothes, I went to his bedroom. He was not there, the bed had not been slept in. I argued with myself for being a fool; but there are moments when instinct overrules reason, and I stole across the compound. The moon flooded the world with a ghostly brilliance as I paused at the study door; and then my fears for Alec's sanity were confirmed, for he was speaking in an odd, sing-song voice. As for the words, they seemed to belong to a sort of Hindu incantation; every now and then he would adjure the Beloved to come forth from prison, and, for the rest, poured forth strings of expressions most unfitting for a respectable man to hear, much less to repeat.

Suddenly I heard an answering voice, sounding in a sort of soft croon, and the thought suddenly struck me with disgust that he must be taken up with some native woman.

Well, then I thought that I would be going since he was evidently in no danger such as I had feared, and sick at heart I was moving off when I heard a

faint noise in the angle of the wall. At first, in the staring moonlight, I could see nothing; but I shut my eyes, and afterwards looked straight whence the sound had come. Then I saw a man hiding in the shadow, and in his hand he clutched a knife.

Obviously he was waiting for Alec to come out, with what motive — jealousy?

There was something peculiarly disgusting in the thought of Alec being mixed up in some vulgar intrigue (with a heathen, too!) after all the cant about inner life and asceticism.

I still looked at the man; and at this moment he moved slightly, so that the raw white glare fell dead on his face, revealing him to be the native who had come, a year since, to beg Alec to kill the panther.

My voice rang out harshly in the unearthly stillness as I asked him what he meant by lurking there. He still kept silence and then Alec opened the door suddenly and stood upon the threshold. The morning's annoyance paled before his fury now. His face was absolutely convulsed, and looked horrible in that ghastly light as he poured forth a torrent of the bitterest reproaches at me for interrupting his labours and ruining his life-work, and I do not know what besides: for I was so taken aback that I could not believe my ears, and the moment after he had shut the door again from within. As he did so, the native, invisible in the shadows behind me, leaped forward, knife in hand. The door had just closed behind

Alec; I caught the man and wrenched his knife from him, holding him panting, after a short struggle. At that instant a long shuddering shriek came from inside the room. It was so terrible that I dropped my victim, who immediately made the best of his escape; then, a moment after, there came the sound of a heavy fall. I tore open the door, and a shaft of moonlight entering with me pointed across the floor to where Alec's body lay, face downwards, in a stream of blood. Then something rushed past me from the corner in the shadows, and with her eyes blazing from rage and terror a full-grown panther sprang past me into the night.

MR. BUDGE AND THE HOOPOO

WE all know how shocking it is to prevaricate; yet how many persons are there, who, being ignorant as Pontius Pilate of the truth, fail to show even his laudable interest in the subject.

I never (now) wander a hair's breadth from the exactly truthful course which I have set myself to follow; in spite of making many bitter enemies thereby.

I owe this virtue entirely to the Golden-Crested Hoopoo, for I used to be just as much of a — well, humbug as my neighbour.

Do not imagine that I am an ornithologist; on the contrary, I hate birds.

An ardent student of heredity, I like to think that this abhorrence is traceable to an incident, I might almost say *the* incident, in the life of my great uncle Tobit, who was once savaged by a canary (he used to say "by a mule" because, except to canary fanciers, it sounded better).

At the time of which I write I was a regular reader of one particular newspaper, where there is usually a natural history article by one particular writer whose name I will not divulge, because I find

it quite difficult enough to obtain an audience for myself without giving free advertisements to other people.

Now this unfortunate individual never takes a walk abroad without observing much that is both curious and interesting. The rarest birds teem past his head and the most enthralling natural phenomena unfold themselves beneath his benign gaze. I belong to another and more common class. I have never seen an unusual bird; I am sure that the cat would always see it first, and the wee, modest, crimson tippit flow'r is the rarest botanical specimen that I have ever crushed beneath my somewhat flat, if well-shaped foot. Consequently, I must own to a long-standing jealousy of this fortunate writer.

But also, and chiefly, I like a little joke. Providing it be thoroughly refined (I hate anything French or involved), a jest is certain of approval from me. I thoroughly enjoy my first of April, and I am not ashamed to own it.

Well, this keen sense of humour nearly led to my undoing; as far as a man in my position can be undone by any circumstances in itself trivial.

For one fateful lay in January I wrote to the newspaper in question, and, overcoming my natural repugnance to birds, I described a purported glimpse of that infernal hoopoo. I chose this name because, having chanced upon it in a dictionary, I thought it struck pleasantly upon the ear. It reminded me

somehow of Cooe (Great Uncle Tobit ended in Australia, against his will, so I have, in consequence, a romantic sentiment for that country): "Hoo-poo"! Followed by a note of exclamation it sounds like a slogan.

"Golden crested" too: how very tasteful! and, to make the fowl more remarkable, I "noticed particularly that the crest was shot with pale green like young larches in spring."

Far be it from me to justify my conduct. Beginning in jest I confess that I warmed to the work (a trait not uncommon among visionaries), and hardly had my communication appeared in the paper before letters upon the subject flowed into the correspondence column: containing questions and asking me for details.

But I discovered a strain of Machiavellian cunning in my nature (the relative to whom repeated reference has already been made first saw the light under blue Italian skies, and was originally christened Tobito), so I managed to pass through the ordeal without any compromising statements concerning that lurid rencontre.

My original communication must have been printed at a period of universal leisure: for, as well as what appeared in the paper—perfect strangers overwhelmed me with pages of manuscript. I say "manuscript" because a letter is, in my opinion, something very different: it should begin with civil-

ity, develop into polite inquiry after health, and conclude by a just reflection upon the state of the weather.

The miscellaneous correspondence which was addressed to me at that time did not answer in the least to this description. Four scrawly pages came from a youth to say that he would like to know my opinion, as a lover of the simple life, upon rowing as a pastime: did I not think it most important that his skin should act freely?

I answered cleverly that there could not be two opinions upon the subject.

A woollen manufacturer pressed upon me with some indelicacy a patent undervest: saying that I should find it invaluable "when out watching for hoopoo."

Several agents urged me to let my house, "situated in a healthy locality five minutes from the Bakerloo Tube, and peculiarly favoured as a post for purposes of Natural History observation. In the garden, extending for fully two acres, the habits of the rarer migratory species can be easily studied from the old-world arbour; in summer a mass of creepers." This last was true, and, as I sat there that summer while they crept over me, stinging as only the woolly caterpillar *can* sting in the suburbs, I ground my teeth and wondered if the joke were not going too far. By this time (in private correspondence only) I had allowed the hoopoo to fly into the house for a

moment, "flashing like a gilded arrow through the basement," and this brought another shoal. People offered small sums "for the beautiful creature, to be kept as a pet." The writers usually "could not afford to give much for it; but affection and a kind home were worth more, etc." I somehow seemed to be vaguely included in the bargain myself!

Of course, it was unnecessary to answer all these letters; but the pastime grew upon me like secret drinking in less respectable men. At first I did not wish to write back; but I was brought up to reply to all correspondence by return of post, and the habit sticks.

An American lady actually offered me a substantial sum for the house and garden "during the London season," if I could "guarantee the hoopoo, as she wished to give dinner-parties." She ended up by saying that "she was crazy on the old English folklore." She seemed to think that the hoopoo was a kind of mediæval ghost.

Meanwhile, there is no story, they say, without a so-called love interest, and I happened to be engaged at the time to a lady whose name need not be given here. My sister called her a chemical blonde (it is a way sisters have). She was the daughter of an important dealer in what he termed "perishables," whose wealth was undoubted, but who never seemed happy unless he was fussing about his "Emporium." From strategic reasons, I became a regular (cash)

customer; how often have I received insignificant change from the plump hand of my prospective father-in-law! I regarded the ceremony as a kind of pleasant omen, while mechanically verifying the amount, as he exclaimed pompously, "every one receives the same attention here, be he prince or be he peasant"; and I always used to wonder if a member of either class had ever crossed his threshold.

But I digress. Suffice it to say that a fatal sobriquet was bestowed upon the lady of my choice, need I add what it was? Again the cursed bird caused me considerable inconvenience: for the engagement came to an abrupt end.

From that time I resolved to emulate the knight who, dared by a lady to leap into a den of wild beasts to fetch a glove, performed that rash feat and flung the desired object into her face. "She" had often dared me to try for our Municipal Council, and certainly nothing resembled a crowd of wild beasts more than did our neighbourhood in the throes of the struggle. Also I knew that my success would be a sufficient punishment to her for having spurned me.

Of course, my late prospective father-in-law was my opponent. Such is fate. My politics were simple: merely the opposite to his. As a programme I know no better. Opening the local newspaper at the opening of the campaign, this monstrous heading met my gaze:

We POOH POOH THE HOOPOO

followed by an equally silly verse:

We pooh pooh the Hoopoo.
We pooh pooh the Hoo.
We don't like the Hoopoo,
And we don't like you.

"She" had evidently inspired this coarse jibe.

It is surprising how poisonous a perfectly commonplace woman can be once she is roused. I assure you that this ridiculous jargon echoed in my head all through that eventful day. I realised that here was my chance in life. Victory meant the esteem of all, and I should have lived down all recent unpleasantness.

Upon the other hand, defeat would mean ruin, except perhaps financially; for our borough, if corrupt, is easily satisfied. Owing to the hideous revelations of recent times the most careful efforts were made, *not* to restrain from corruption ourselves (a suicidal policy in our neighbourhood), but to pounce upon any such tendency on the part of the enemy.

Thus, while each of us referred to the other in the most flattering of accents and dwelt with repetition on the integrity and other honourable qualities that distinguished his opponent, both had "taken every precaution," as my followers put it.

The father of my ex-betrothed had a cloud of witnesses, so to speak, in his pay; they were trained to a

hair in the answering of every question such as "Intimidation," "Alibi," "Bribery," the Corrupt Practices Act, etc., etc., etc.

Not for nothing, however, had I observed my adversary as a merchant. I had noticed his consideration in having the milk carefully watered lest it prove too strong for the consumer. I had constantly seen him substitute elaborate chemical products for the primitive article demanded by the customer in innocence of heart; and almost invariably the full measure, pressed down and overflowing, as described in the Bible, he had reduced by a third (doubtless fearing lest the weight of the parcel should prove too heavy for the purchaser). These incidents, now collected in my notebook under the title of "Comments on Certain Commerce," were very useful reserve ammunition.

Then the first blow fell. I had engaged some detectives who, dressed as labouring men seeking employment, were told to loll about the numerous public-houses and see how many free drinks were offered by the adversary. Two of them, in their zeal, accepted refreshments themselves and were raked senseless from beneath the bar when they had been on duty for about fifty minutes. The third (a teetotaler) was pounced on by the landlord and compelled to help in the coffee-room, with the gloomy promise of a few scraps and a glass of beer. The remaining three were almost forcibly hired by a

farmer, who hurried them off at once in a dog-cart ten miles off.

Upon one point I had been quite firm. I formally forbade any mention of his daughter or of our former temporary connection.

My adversary showed no such delicacy.

In accents husky (but not with emotion, as he led the crowd to believe) he alluded to the betrothal which he said he had been "forced to annul." After pausing to allow this surprising phrase to sink into the audience, he proceeded to embark upon the most gross and offensive calumny.

He first dragged in the whole hoopoo story. No detail was omitted. He wound it up by saying: "And now, gentlemen, what was the true meaning of all this?" To my horror he jeered at the presence of a bird, and pointed out that the visitor was of a wholly different character — of such a character, indeed, as forced him immediately to break off the engagement. He also accused me of misleading the British public and humbugging a leading organ of our justly esteemed Press by an indecorous joke: probably made for a bet. I will not outrage your delicacy by entering further into this terrible episode. He wound up his tissue of falsehoods — amongst which was a picturesque description of a private life passed in unequalled dissipation and brilliant orgy by saying, "In America they have a saying called 'Coming the hoodoo' over some one. Do

not, fellow-citizens, allow my opponent to 'come the hoopoo' over you."

When I read the account of this I deemed all chance of success at an end. The local Press, flattered at the sycophantic praise of the scoundrel, was with him heart and soul (if the Press possesses either of these expensive luxuries). Of course, advertisements from the Emporium were leading and remunerative features about this time in all the local papers. I was a stricken man; never in my best days could I have hoped to be his equal as a liar — and I felt doomed now. My fountain of eloquence was run dry, and I held my peace. The agents said that as public speaking almost invariably illustrates the maxim "Speech is silver — silence is golden," my silence might do good.

The constituents clamoured for meetings, they added, but it did not matter in the least who spoke, or what they spoke about, as all meetings were only made an excuse for slumber or brawl. I was hurried to the outer fringe of the constituency, where no newspaper, thank goodness, was ever read; the people all spend the day in factories, and are far too busy hurrying to and fro to waste time over the papers.

I only returned to the town just before polling-day, and my demeanour, supposed to represent that of a libelled saint, looked far more like that of a convicted criminal. However, the moment that I

first met an acquaintance I received a shock of surprise.

He warmly shook my hand, and when I asked him what my chances were he said: "Ever so much better. It was that old bounder's speech that did it. Nobody thought you had it in you." I asked for further explanation. He merely winked.

I hurried round to my agent. To my pained surprise he informed me that my opponent's speech had, in fact, delighted the town.

Apparently his picturesque and wholly untruthful description of the orgies held in my humble villa amused vastly those who had known me all my life. They had, he informed me with many apologies, considered me as rather dull and slightly priggish. The whole constituency was roaring with pleased laughter.

Meantime my supporters had strained every nerve to out-Herod Herod in other ways. There is no doubt that people dislike being given short weight. Likewise the enemy did a vast trade in potted meats, and upon being asked once what he put into the tins and boxes he had replied gaily: "All sorts. I would pot you if I got the chance." Every one remembered and was helped to remember this sinister repartee when a small pamphlet appeared under the title of *Pot Luck*. It was of great length, and hinted that in certain Private Potted Meats the ingredients were not all that might be expected, and that it was a sporting chance whether you encountered

tough portions of the advertised ingredients or samples of your deceased wife's sister. This last delicate by-play had to be scratched out and "mother-in-law" substituted, because no joke is ever recognised as such in our borough unless this classic element is introduced.

Once the revised version of this document had appeared there was no doubt of its effect. As a cultured friend of mine remarked, "It was a real *feu d'artifice*!" Having tracked the expression to the dictionary, I concurred, since, like a rocket, it first flung its wealth of brilliancy into the air and then descending resolved itself into a thick stick which struck my opponent smartly, and, in fact, finished him.

Upon polling day I suffered the tortures of the condemned, and I realised that the eternity of a few hours was not mere poetical nonsense, but bitter truth.

I can hardly bear to think of it now, and I had ample time then to make the most binding vows of future truthfulness before the happy result of the voting was declared.

Then, even at that supreme moment, my keenly developed sense of humour aroused me to notice a well-meant cry from my cook in the crowd:

HOO POO POO RAY!

LA CIGALE

La Cigale ayant chanté tout l'été
Se trouva fort dépourvue
Quand la bise fut venue.

La Fontaine.

LELA GAISFORD came originally from America. Now an American girl without fortune produces, in Europe, the impression of a story without a point, so I must add that she was not American; her father was an English Jew, and her mother a Belgian. Although strictly legitimate she described herself in moments of expansion as a Spanish foundling — which was an inexpensive and harmless manner of acquiring a certain romantic cachet; and, of course, people's parentage interests no one except themselves, and perhaps their money-lenders.

Her appearance was nondescript, seeming to belong to no particular country or climate: extremely small, slight, dark and pale, her individuality was as devoid of salient points as her figure.

I myself, a virtuous spinster with a taste for human affairs sometimes described as a strong vein of curiosity, met her abroad upon various occasions in different hotels.

Now I have a theory which I cherish as I might have cherished a child. We all know that the confirmed spinster has a hard fight to keep young; I do not mean young in body, but young in mind. She becomes old-fashioned and narrow with an alarming ease and speed. Do not exclaim "Sympathy with others keeps one young," because that is a useless platitude. Spinsters are popular as a class; indeed, unless actively disagreeable, they have more than their share both of friends and of confidences; all the same their individuality becomes sooner and more definitely wrinkled than that of their married sisters, unless they compound for themselves a kind of mental cosmetic.

Now I confess to mine, which is as follows: whenever I feel that my mind, like my figure, is in danger of becoming "set," whenever I find myself thinking or saying, "Under no circumstances should I do this," or "I cannot imagine myself thinking that" (sure danger signals) I fly to Bradshaw—whether English or Continental depends upon the state of my finances at the moment—open the volume at random and, if the place upon which my eyes first rest be neither too distant nor too difficult of access, hurry thither to lose my ordinary self and my ordinary way of life. Since my character is above suspicion, these absences never occasion even a flutter of interest amongst my friends, and I return with a rejuvenated mind, having shed the prej-

udices, the fixed opinions, and daily round of thought — which are even more ageing than the daily round of habit and action.

The study of human nature is a chief ingredient in my mental cosmetic; and of course the first lesson one learns is never to judge from the first or second impressions, but to await the third. Now at first Lela struck me as uninteresting, then as really clever, and finally, as neither the one nor the other.

Of course, no human being is uninteresting (although it is surprising how completely some people manage to convey that illusion), it is merely that the observer lacks either intelligence or energy to discover anything to the contrary.

For ever trying to produce an impression, to keep in the limelight so to speak, she was become like the ornaments that women wear in their hair: of a superficial sparkle quite different from that of real jewels — quivering and jumping mechanically upon the end of a wire! With my rooted dislike to pose I do not know why she continued to interest me; unless it was that she seemed surrounded by an unconscious pathos, not unlike the “aura” of spiritualists. No one else noticed this, and in fact I myself was at first inclined to impute it to my imagination.

But always it haunted me — a little pale pathetic shadow which tantalised, and then eluded my curiosity.

She invariably constituted that rather wearying element known as "the life and soul" of the hotels in question.

At all hazards she must be in the midst of everything, whether it was an excursion, a joke, or the latest news, and naturally she was always to be found wherever there was most animation. Somehow she seemed indispensable to every one's daily enjoyment, and yet — equally inexplicably — when she left nobody appeared to miss her in the least.

We met in this way two or three times, and then I began to come upon her in London; she had insinuated herself into the London season in the same way as she had become part of the social life in those other places, and still played for effect as feverishly as ever.

Now if you spend much time at this game you are apt to arrive at the end of your resources. For instance, Lela's *métier* made it necessary that she should cap the best story with a better, as well as again focus the general attention upon herself directly this showed any sign of straying. We know that necessity is the mother of invention, but it is not safe to invent for long about other people. Thus she was reduced, like most of her kind, to fall back upon herself as a topic, to boast of deeds in which she had played the leading part, and to repeat anecdotes which circled round the same subject; all this not from vain glory, but because, as I have hinted, the stock

of society entertainers must become exhausted in time.

I remember thinking, as I watched the nervous tension of her little face, how much she must wish occasionally to create a diversion by balancing a plate upon the end of her nose, or to substitute a rapid juggle of oranges and bottles for the "patter" at which she toiled so incredibly hard. Also the brutal suspicion grew strong upon me that she was shaping into a bore: that social product towards which London shows no mercy, and I wondered what would happen to the girl then. There was nothing: no charm, no personality, nothing behind the nervous glitter that danced as though upon wires, and yet the shadowy hint of pathos, which I was alone to see, reached out appealing hands and stirred my heart strings. I began to think of her as *La Cigale* — you remember the fable? Every one else, and perhaps Lela herself, would have laughed at me. I say "perhaps" for, towards the end of the season, I thought that I caught a new expression crossing her face; sometimes a look of apprehension, almost immediately banished.

Did she fear that her little star was soon to wane — could she foresee the end? She made, however, no further sign. Of course, she was living upon her nerves, but nervous vitality lasts quite a long time.

Suddenly something happened. That year there was a popular exhibition. I forget where, and I am

also rather vague as to the nature of the attractions; but it was something to do with buck-jumping.

Tired ponies were driven into the ring, and gigantic men settled themselves comfortably into heavy peaked saddles and stayed there, while the ponies protested, or were driven to protest, against the injustice of destiny.

As a sporting people we thronged to this exhilarating spectacle, and one evening a large party — amongst whom was Lela — went there to wind up what was practically the last night of the season. At the end of the show it was customary for the performers to offer any member of the audience a mount in return for one pound sterling, and the offer was usually treated in the manner in which it was made — namely as a matter of form.

No one wanted to enter the deserted arena where the lights were already half extinguished, and to climb on to an exhausted and perspiring little animal.

Lela, however, either anxious to maintain a reputation for artless impetuosity and dash, or for some other unexplained and theatrical reason, threw a sovereign at the nearest cowboy and leapt into the saddle. The man, stupefied at such an unexpected reply to his challenge, obeyed his first impulse and bent slowly to pick up the coin. Meanwhile, much was occurring in the ring. Lela had fortunately landed safely between the peaks of the saddle, but

the pony, surprised out of his lethargy, mistook her perhaps for a mosquito after his accustomed burden; at all events, he felt that his patience had limits, and with one or two preliminary squeals, he accomplished a real, authentic, and complete "buck-jump" such as his owner, twice daily all through the summer, had vainly urged him to execute before the British public.

Lela should have felt flattered, as it was she merely fell off and hurt one of her legs.

As I have said, the season had come to an end, so that, although sympathetic enough, the girl's numerous acquaintances (she never seemed to make any friends) found themselves drifting away from London, where she was confined upon the top floor of a dreary little nursing home. The surgeon consulted by her aunt — the respectable and unobtrusive source of Lela's dress allowance — had insisted upon her being taken directly to this establishment, in which he had interests none the less real because he did not generally mention them to his patients.

Lela seemed pleased to see me, and asked me to come again. Upon the second occasion I could find no one upon the landing outside her room; however, after knocking, I thought that I heard her say "Come in." To my surprise she was lying with her face buried beneath the bed clothes, crying as if her heart would break, and it was this muffled sound that I had mistaken for her voice. Retreat was im-

possible, as she was evidently now aware of my entrance, for, shaking the hair out of her eyes, she pulled herself together with a gasp. I felt very uncomfortable, but there had been a lonely note in the sobbing that went to my heart and, sitting down, I took one little hot hand in mine, apologising for my unfortunate mistake. She assured me that she did not mind, and went on to say, "I suppose some one was bound to come upon me behind the scenes sooner or later, and I would rather it was you than any one else; you are the only person who has ever taken any interest in me." And then the suppressed, real Lela was revealed at last. More than ever I felt that the summer was over, and that the poor tired little Cigale before me had given way before the first hint of autumn. I learnt that the chatter and the feverish energy had become a second nature to her, and that because she had long ago realised that she could neither attract nor charm, she must be content to amuse. She asked me, without any cynical intention, what use the world had for the lonely confidences and the dull company of the real Lela? Society, she contended, was like any other form of entertainment—if you wished to be amused you had to contribute something—charm, beauty, fortune, wit—anything that helped. She had become so much used to "helping things go," to being so "bright and cheery," to "taking trouble,"—she quoted other people's remarks about

herself with astonishing accuracy — that the process had become more or less mechanical.

“But,” I interrupted, “admitting that your contention is just, do you think that society is worth all this?”

“No,” she answered quickly, “not if you have anything else. And the worst is that I shall soon reach the end of my tether. When a professional entertainer ceases to be funny, to ‘draw,’ no one has any use for him — he slips away and is seen no more; the same fate awaits the amateur — only he or she is called a bore. And do you know what remains for me? I have not the gift of making friends, and even if I had there are too many bores in the world, and not enough friends to go round! In England you have the bore who is a relation, the bore who is a family friend, or towards whom you are under an obligation of long standing: what claims have I to counterbalance these? And England is the only country that has ever attracted me! Have you ever thought of dreary lodgings, of cheap pensions, of family hotels, and the duller kind of Continental health resort in the dead time of year? They are hideous living tombs, and, like the ready-made memorials in stone-masons’ yards: — respectable, with a conscious refinement of taste that is simply a kind of left-handed vulgarity. And there lies the end in store for people like me — who

have no niche in the world. And yet other girls have envied my independence — a cruel gift when I have no capacity for using it."

I remained silent, for I knew that she was right: in spite of all her parade of daring and impulse, her principles and morals were as ice — she simply could not go wrong. What a good wife lost! Perhaps she guessed my thoughts, for she said:

"No man has ever wanted to marry me. I have seen girls no better-looking than myself, and just as penniless, becoming engaged to the most charming people. You see even if someone were really attracted to me he would think that I could never settle down. If they only knew!"

"If they only knew what?" I repeated, stupidly enough.

She sat up in bed and her little white face seemed to blaze with eagerness.

"I'll tell you," she exclaimed. "It is such a relief to 'let go' (as my aunt said, when she gave up keeping a waist!). If you only knew how I have always longed for a home: not rooms you take or a house you lease, but a real home. All my life I have knocked about in hotels and other people's homes; I seem unreal to you, but then that is what existence has always seemed to me! Every day the longing for a real home gets a tighter hold upon me. When I was a child, an English governess told me

that women had no business to love places; that houses only belong to men: fathers or brothers or husbands; that to become fond of them was silly, and means tearing out one's heart in the long-run. Now, if I married, I should give my husband a nice, useful, tea-cosy kind of affection: the sort that men like, you know, because it means comfort and domestic peace without unnecessary demands upon them, or any disconcerting upsetting element. But I should just *adore* my home: every brick and tile of it; especially if it was an old-fashioned house with old-fashioned furniture. I would not care if it was ugly or pretty: I should just feel like stroking the walls and patting the chairs and saying, 'I belong to you now, no fretting or tearing about any more — I am quite safe.' What would it matter to me that the house belonged to him? They say that love begets love, and I know that I should love a house like that so much that even the walls would seem sympathetic, and the pictures would look as if they took an interest in one. I should feel that something was real at last." Her voice fell upon a dreaming note, and then she looked at me suddenly, almost with impatience, exclaiming, "Of course, you can have no conception what my inner life is like, and I shall go on getting more and more restless, and more and more tired; always moving, sick to death of hired rooms, and yet having to live in one and probably die in one — horribly lonely — in a room like

this," and she pointed to the bleak bare walls of the nursing home, and began to cry again.

Well, the task I had set myself was difficult indeed, for men with old-fashioned houses usually want a wife with one of the assets which Lela had enumerated during our conversation — and then I thought of Augustin.

Augustin had proposed to my sister and, like most men who propose to other women, he had always appeared dull and uninteresting. But he possessed a lovely old country-house, also he was still mildly anxious to find a bride. He had always been seeking a wife in a sort of vague muddled way, and it seemed hard that what one might call a lifelong endeavour should meet with such little success. Once indeed he had suddenly burst in upon my sister and had said, "I am thinking of marrying beneath me." "Impossible," she had answered with unintentional rudeness; and then, remembering his impassioned eulogy of her new cook at dinner two evenings before, she had prudently hastened the annual removal to London, rather than allow her treasure to be beguiled from her under any pretext whatsoever.

We never heard any more of his project, and indeed whether her suspicions were justified or not I cannot say. For some time past he had apparently given up the active pursuit of a bride: contenting

himself with "looking out,"—presumably from the windows of his charming old house, and, as it was situated in the middle of a wood, perhaps this was why his occupation had been hitherto fruitless; since nothing more eligible than a hen pheasant ever crossed his line of vision.

It would have been difficult to inveigle him up to London had I not told him that my cellar needed attention; would he come up and assume the office of wine taster and purchaser.

Such an invitation, indicating appreciation of his taste and deference to his judgment, brought him by the earliest possible train. There are several million males in London, yet had I not preferred to summon his aid? Most men like to be thought judges of wine: (I suppose that I ought to except teetotalers, but really I am not sure that I should be justified in doing so).

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"Do you remember that little thing at Aix who used to be the life and soul of the place. I can't think of her name — I wonder what became of her?" Some one said this to me the other day, but I had no need to wonder because I know quite well. You see I stayed there only last Sunday, and I know that she would not mind my friend failing to recall her name, for I was just as sure that Lela had forgotten hers! In the heart of a wood that cuddles down in a Welsh valley, she has found at last that there is

something real. I found her in a dress that certainly dated some way back (because some rooms wanted doing up, and one cannot afford everything) busy making chintz covers — a task which I was obliged immediately to share.

The restlessness is gone. She looks almost pretty — Augustin thinks her so beautiful that he would like to sell one of his pictures to get her painted, but then he always was ridiculous. When, quite at the beginning of things, I hinted this to Lela she smiled, and said that on the contrary, he was “so safe and so real.”

So perhaps was “La Fourmi,” but somehow “La Cigale” makes more of a story.

THE THREE-CORNERED SECRET¹

I

IT is now many years since the idle fancy of a painter first led me to Sapoli, a little village in Southern Italy. Most of the inhabitants (hardly fifty in all, if one does not count the children) sun their lives away on the yellow sea-wall. Here they sit like flies all through the long, brilliant day; and the purple evening finds them clustered round the little inn. This, which boasts of a dingy coffee-room, is the centre of social life. They do not find very much to talk about. Love and hate walk here as through every village, until Death overtakes them. An Englishman is a nine days' wonder, but even that can be assimilated; and after one or two evenings, during which my presence cast a reserve over the conversation, I sat unheeded in a corner. The atmosphere was loaded with smoke and garlic. Light and shade held carnival here; and the

¹ This story was written several years ago. I must say this in justice to myself, for only the other day — in fact at Easter time — my attention was drawn to the fact that two of the characters resembled those in a recent popular novel, viz., a blind hero and an ugly heroine.

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sensuous half of the so-called artistic temperament — that half which drinks in rich glow and sombre shadows — was well satisfied. I can see now the blue clouds of smoke from out of which dark eyes shone and lean brown hands gesticulated. Outside, moving groups in clothing of bright colours catch the eye, and merry laughter breaks on the ear; while beyond, the night reigns in silence with a crown of early stars.

I always remember my first year there when Pietro Bonetti, a gnarled figure whose face, a sun-burnt mask, was invested with the pathetic interest of poverty-stricken age, used to be the chief talker: his favourite topic, oddly enough, his own rather bitter experiences. Eagerly, in a high, cracked voice, he would describe his marriage with the false-hearted Rosa, and his audience, although knowing the tale by heart, would lean forward intently listening — statuesque in their immobility. The thin voice tightened its hold on each long-drawn sentence until at last the climax came: this was an elopement with a foreigner, the only one except myself who had ever visited that out of the way place. At this moment Pietro's language would lose all restraint, and become a torrent of the vilest invective. The picture before me of the story-teller and his absorbed hearers was so complete, that when the old voice had died in a quaver I would creep away — for fear of having it spoilt by any anti-climax — to where along the

grey highway the olives trembled beneath a white moon, and the whole air breathed of roses and orange flowers.

My days passed in work and my nights in dreamless peace; and so fascinated was I by the place that I returned there every year since.

It was on the Sunday after my arrival in 19—that my little kingdom was invaded. The morning was beautiful, and the sun burned the paving-stones until even the mongrels turned for shelter into the doorways. The blue sky was dazzling to look upon, like a new-made sword; and even the bell of our little church rang out fitfully, as though panting from the heat. I am not a Roman Catholic, but Santa Maria della Costa numbered me amongst the regular congregation. It was a very old building, with a paved aisle polished by the tread of many feet, whilst age had almost obliterated all features from the waxen saint in the little side-chapel. The service was soon over, and in a very short time I was making my way along the narrow flags into fresh air again.

The glory of the day met one at the open door. It was now so hot that the pavement stung one's feet, and on reaching the priest's alley with its welcome coolness I lingered gladly, every pulse tingling with the Italian spring. Emerald lizards glided through the speckled shadows, and over all the garden, which

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was a treasure-house of flowers, the heat haze shivered as though in an ecstasy.

The true spirit of Italy was here; and away from the prying eyes of tourists and strangers gave herself freely to the love of the sun.

It will be imagined then that I was roughly disturbed by the sight of an unknown figure in front of me walking towards the inn: a woman dressed all in black. I had for so long been the only representative of the outside world in this sequestered place that, ridiculous as it may seem, I had come to regard it as my right to be alone.

It was indeed like my little kingdom, and, at any rate, the cradle of whatever talent of mine that the world recognised. Excepting the few villagers, I alone knew of its beauty and peace, and there was rage in my heart when I caught sight of another interloper at the door of the inn.

This was a man who, sitting on one of the few chairs of which the place could boast, leaned forward as I approached. I felt obliged to return his curiously intent gaze, for he had the most beautiful face that I had ever seen. The features were perfect, classic, the hair was black against the bright sunburn of the skin, and the eyes were wide and dark, as though full of dreams, and held in their depths what seemed a patient, tragic, resignation. To a painter life is so often a struggling pilgrimage

between what is beautiful and what is real, that when he suddenly meets with both he sometimes forgets his manners. Some moments passed before I remembered mine, and reluctantly turning from that marvellous face I made the best of my way upstairs.

Meanwhile the other stranger had vanished.

That afternoon I went for a long ramble along the foot of the olive-wooded hills. Around me the world was heavenly, and yet, when I tried to settle down to some sketching, I was so overcome with annoyance and bad temper that I proved good for nothing. To you who read this it will seem outrageous that I should feel so much irritated by the arrival of two tourists; but, indeed, no one was more alive than myself to the absurdity of my vexation. I knew I had no right to expect that others would keep away; but we are often scarcely conscious of what a large place habit occupies in our outlook on the future. Year after year I had returned to Sapoli, until I had come to feel it as a matter of course that my room should be ready at the inn; and I looked forward to renewing my friendships among the villagers.

Amidst the grime and soot of London, when life seemed all going wrong I would look at my almanac, and gain patience to work through the weeks lying between me and my rest haven. Except for the death of old Pietro, nothing had changed since my first visit; and now it was all over with quiet and

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solitude! I shut my sketch-book, feeling that the end of my dream was come, until then never having realised how large a share of my life it had held.

This romantic couple (surely that beautiful face was connected with romance?) might even herald an invasion from Cook. For how many similar outrages, I considered, is this custom of honeymooning not responsible? A bridegroom brings his bride to "rough it" in some place so perfect that afterwards they cannot keep it hidden, but must needs praise it to their friends; and close on the heels of a few enthusiasts comes a tourist agent, then a hotel, a band, and all the other attendant plagues of an up-to-date civilisation.

I groaned in spirit as I looked towards my little refuge; the village crowning the summit of a hill shone yellow and red in the sunset, in the centre stood the tower of a little church, and the whole was encircled by a long, low wall. The church and the quaint old houses had stood for generations without a record, without history: far more attractive, for then one could weave this for oneself.

I was climbing up the road, and my way lay through the deserted ground that had belonged to Pietro Bonetti who had died during the last winter. By a hedge of trailing roses stood the strange woman dressed in black, with a thick, black veil; and to my surprise she came quickly towards me.

"Sir, allow me to speak to you," she said in Eng-

lish, with a strange appearance of haste struggling with shyness; and then she raised her veil.

I can truthfully say that I had never seen such a thoroughly ugly woman. Only her hands — I noticed them as she held them out to ask me to stop — were beautiful.

"You saw the stranger sitting by the inn this morning?" she began timidly.

"Your son?" I replied, with my mind fixed on the strangely incongruous hands.

"My husband," she corrected smiling, and then sighed. "You may well be surprised. Are you in haste, or can you spare me a moment? I want you to promise me — to do me a favour. I am sure that you hate us for disturbing your solitude. It is of no use to protest, you *must* hate us; but perhaps one day I may weary you with our story, and then you will understand, and perhaps forgive me. Excuse my introducing myself to you in this way, but at the little inn we cannot remain strangers, and I entreat you to grant my request before you meet my husband. Monsieur, you may not have realised that he is blind, quite blind" — here her voice trembled; "he thinks — he has a delusion," again she hesitated, and her face became a dull red as she continued: "he imagines that I am beautiful. Monsieur is a great artist; my husband knows that you are here, and is longing to meet one of whom he has heard so much. Naturally we shall not presume upon your

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kindness; for something tells me that you are kind, and I am never mistaken. But I must warn you that he may speak of this idea about me, and, of course, if I had not told you it is impossible that you should not have showed your surprise. For pity's sake do not let any chance word or hesitation enlighten him! The blind are so quick to notice. Promise me this!"

She looked at me with a pathetic mixture of shame and entreaty. It was no business of mine; and naturally I agreed to do as she wished, although I felt very much embarrassed. She caught my hand in gratitude, and said simply:

"I cannot thank you enough, perhaps you will never know how much I owe you for this. I had no right to ask you, except the right that women are supposed to have to the chivalry of a man! Please forgive my boldness; this is my name," and she left me with a card in my hand. On it was written:

MADAME ANTOINE LENOIR.

I need hardly say that I have replaced the real name by another, for the whole story took place too recently for me to give any clue to the principal characters. It is enough to say that for some minutes I tried in vain to remember how I had already heard the real name (which was a very uncommon one). Suddenly it came back to me.

Some years before, a clever French violinist,

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whom I will call here Antoine Lenoir, of whom much had been made by both those who know and those who talk about music, had disappeared from before the public in consequence of a severe illness. Having enjoyed popularity for so short a time he had acquired no lasting claim on British sympathy. Also, as he possessed ample private means, no one felt required to worry their neighbour in the cause of charity, and so he was quickly forgotten, and now he had apparently married. But what inducement could he have had to choose such an unattractive bride? Money was the obvious motive in any other instance but this one. In any case, how did he come to think her beautiful? It was at all events rather unpleasant to find oneself pledged to help to deceive a blind man; to a so-called "artist" beauty is usually more or less essential, and I shuddered to think of marriage with so plain a woman. Even her well-cut dress had not hidden the high shoulders and hunched up, badly-made figure, in which the grace of youth seemed never to have sought even a temporary dwelling.

There was something so odd about the whole affair that my annoyance of the morning was forgotten, and I took my place at the evening meal filled with an uncomfortable curiosity. As I have said already, the inn was primitive, and my meals were invariably placed on a table near the olive tree which grew beside the door; in front ran the wall, with the

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narrow road between, and as the inn garden stood on a slope, one was able to see over the low wall right across the beautiful stretch of valley. My fellow lodgers were not there — it was only afterwards that I found, to my remorse, that they had eaten early in order not to be in my way.

However, later, when I was enjoying a peaceful pipe, I saw the couple crossing the road. He was leaning upon her arm, and something in the sadness of her face made me go and meet them and ask to be introduced to her husband. I found him charming; his illness had not prevented him from keeping up an interest in the affairs of the world; and soon we were talking of the life from which he was now cut off. His wife seemed delighted with his animation, and seeing us engrossed in conversation, moved away to watch the distant view melting into dusk.

He listened to her retreating footsteps, and then sighed. "No one has a wife like mine — if only I could see her face!" His voice showed a pain that admitted of no reserve. "Ah, monsieur," he continued, with the eagerness so common to children and to the blind, "you see her; and I never meet anyone whom I can ask. Is she not beautiful?"

I looked in silence to where the gaunt figure was outlined against the wall. She was out of hearing, but perhaps she guessed the dreaded subject of our conversation; for at this moment she looked up with

the same expression of anguish and appeal. I thought of her hands and answered resolutely:

"Yes, beautiful. You may well think so."

The situation was embarrassing, and I was glad that my singularly laconic answer satisfied him.

Presently he spoke again:

"Of course as a painter you love beauty; we musicians also live for it. Some people say that the blind can form an accurate idea of the features by touch. But, of course, people like myself who have only been afflicted comparatively lately are incapable of this. I can only picture her in my mind as I fancy that she must look. They say that character influences looks; and so I know that she must have the face of an angel. You must forgive my want of reserve, monsieur, and think of my peculiar position, and when one marries a woman like that one will always remain a lover rather than a husband."

At this moment she turned and walked towards us, and on his beautiful face there was an expression of worship as she approached.

I was surprised to find how comparatively little I saw of the Lenoirs as the days went on. I had persuaded them to dine with me under the olive tree; but except for this evening meal I spent the days in wandering about the countryside. Then one day they told me that they wished to buy old Pietro's cottage and land.

The news was "broken" to me quite apologet-

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ically by Madame Lenoir, as though I should undoubtedly resent it. But by this time I welcomed their presence where I had begun by considering it an infliction.

She evidently had not grasped this, for she remained fidgetting nervously by my side, breaking at length into hesitating speech:

"Oh, monsieur, we cannot apologise enough for intruding into your sanctuary. You had the whole place to yourself; and instead of avoiding us you have been so kind. You gave me a promise which I had no right to ask, and you are so good to us ——"

Of course I cut short this embarrassing flow of gratitude, begging her not to think me such a monster. I really enjoyed my conversations with Antoine, and I was beginning to stumble into a friendship with his wife. I say stumble, because her curious deceit made an unpleasant obstacle between us — an odd wistfulness hung about her, and gave her the charm of individuality, allied to a singularly sympathetic speaking voice.

They were very busy getting their cottage ready, and at last they announced to me that it was finished, and that they would like me to come to their house-warming party; in fact, they added, the house-warming depended upon my acceptance of the invitation, as I would be the only guest.

Their cottage windows looked down the hill, over a sea of grey olives and across miles of blue coun-

try. It was a divine view, and, forgetting, I was about to exclaim upon its beauty to my host, when fortunately I checked myself in time. A kind of verandah ran along the whole of the house front, while out of what had been a deserted stable they had made a large sitting-room. In this a piano occupied the principal position, and after dinner my host announced: "Now you are going to have a surprise: my wife will sing to us."

She led him to the instrument, and he played a few hesitating chords. Then her voice rang out. She told me afterwards that it was a mad Hungarian gypsy song. I only know that she had a glorious voice, and that she seemed to lay her heart bare as she sang. There was the passion of happiness, and yet was it altogether happiness, or was there sacrifice running through it? And then, sorrow dying away stifled; broken into ultimate silence. Our eyes met as she finished: hers were full of tears, and I know that I could not speak; as for her husband he was lost to everything except that magic voice. As he came back to his surroundings he expressed my thoughts when he exclaimed, "See what she has sacrificed for me." She bent and said something to him, but he shook his head incredulously, and then we all broke into rather laboured talk. She would not sing again.

"Antoine has had quite enough dissipation and gaiety. If there is any more music he will not

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sleep at all to-night, and I have so much for him to do to-morrow to help in the house. We are only half arranged here as yet: the workmen are so lazy."

When I rose to say good-night she offered to show me a short cut through the olive trees, and as we walked she told me her history.

It appeared that Rosa, old Bonetti's wife, was her mother. Her father was the Frenchman who had lured the lovely young Italian away from Sapoli.

When their child was born, unwanted and uncared for, they were living in the south of France. Her parents hated her ugliness, and she grew up in absolute neglect. Then suddenly her voice was "discovered" by a rich Frenchwoman who heard the child singing in the streets, and who offered to take her to Paris, where she received a good education and the best of training. Her début ended in a scene of enthusiasm, and she gradually repaid her benefactress the money expended upon her in the past, and worked hard, realising the difference between becoming the fashion and remaining the fashion. At heart she was still the lonely child with a craving for affection that she had never known, and, even more, for some one whom she could surround with the passion and devotion which had waited for so long, and which no one had ever wanted. You see she was of the rarer kind of woman who longs to give even more than to receive. She saw that her parents now looked upon her as a

safe and extremely profitable form of investment instead of an unnecessary and distasteful burden; neither point of view was pleasant, so to keep off bitterness she worked harder than ever. And then Lenoir came into her life. She was singing at a concert given by her former benefactress, a great friend of Lenoir. The violinist, broken by illness and the loss of his sight, and parted from his violin, had lost all interest in life, and it was only at the last moment that he had crept in amongst the audience, guided by a servant.

Just as she was going to sing some one pointed him out to her; she knew his story, and her quick sympathy was deeply touched; it seemed that she was singing to the blind man alone.

The rest is quickly told: that evening he dined with the two women. He had fallen madly in love with that wonderful voice, and poor Lina returned the infatuation.

Her friend told her that Lenoir had exclaimed, "A woman with that voice must be beautiful," and Lina burst into a passion of tears. Was Love to come so near and then to take flight? Was she never to know more than the sound of his wings? Her friend, touched and frightened, implored her to keep silence about her appearance, and promised her help and connivance. Lina assured me pathetically enough, that she was not so ugly then, that care and anxiety, and, above all, fear lest her secret should be

discovered, had aged her prematurely, and had ruthlessly taken whatever appearance of youth she had ever worn. To return to her story: they were married, and then they disappeared altogether from Paris. Her parents were easily disposed of by a large bribe, and Antoine had an ample private fortune. They could wander wherever they liked, and, fortunately for her secret, his health was still frail, and they were obliged to lead a quiet life: one little servant ministering to their wants. Remembering her mother's description of Sapoli she thought that here indeed would she find the safety and peace after which she longed, for to acquire Pietro's ground had been easy enough.

I asked if she ever felt regret for the brilliant existence that she had left, and, even if I wished, I could not repeat her reply. The passionate tenderness with which she spoke of Antoine left me no room for doubt. My countrywomen could feel the same, but they could not describe it, for it needs the Italian or French eloquence (and she had the blood of both nations in her veins) to express that abandonment of devotion which is so entirely absorbing that there is no place for so-called sacrifice. And in her case it was mutual, for it was obvious that Antoine adored her also. Of remorse for her deception she felt none; she knew that while she had begun by holding his heart, she was now his right hand, his eyesight, his existence itself. But the fear that

shadowed her own life — the fear of discovery — never left her day or night.

I told her that she exaggerated her danger, and that she would reduce it still further by pointing out to her husband that his was the only admiration she wanted, and that since he could not see her, it only pained and grieved her to hear him talk about her beauty to others. She agreed to try this plan; but repeated that nothing could remove her fear, and then she slipped away in the grey and silver light cast by the moon across the olive trees.

II

I left Sapoli that year with more than my usual regret, for I had made two perfect friends. On looking over these pages I find that I have made very little mention of Antoine Lenoir's charm, perhaps because it is rather difficult for one man to describe another. Curiously enough his chief characteristics were those of his wife: a delightful and natural sympathy, which was allied to an undaunted courage. It was curious that unlike her he never showed a trace of sadness. He had schooled himself to overcome his affliction, often saying to her he had a gift more precious than his, and when one saw them together, one could believe it.

Perhaps it was our isolation

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the rest of the world that made our friendship so close. All our occupations and interests, even our thoughts, became common property; and I have only to shut my eyes to recall the long starlit evenings on the verandah, to see Antoine's eager, perfect face, bent as he joined the discussion, and to hear the beautiful, low voice of his wife as she answered him. Long letters from him dictated to Lina, written upon every conceivable subject, reached me fairly often in London, and every now and then an untidy scrawl from her, touching very rarely upon those topics nearest her heart — Antoine, their happiness, her secret — but chiefly concerning my work: had I finished this? Had I begun that? What did the critics say? All so flattering because so sincere. Our letters were like our conversations, they were often the continuation of our discussions; and I know that the evening when mine arrived and was taken out upon the verandah to read together, would be just as welcome as one I would look forward to spending with theirs, by my solitary hearth with a pipe.

There was a comfortable and sincere
in the friendship.

more than
weeks in
and had
were passed
in London

again, after the most delightful visit that I ever remembered.

We parted full of plans for the following year. Imagine my surprise when, hardly had I been two months in London, before I received an agitated letter from Lina to say that Antoine was set upon their coming over to pay me a visit. At once her anxious fears were aroused for the safety of her pitiful secret. What was she to do? I telegraphed offering to go out to Sapoli. She answered that he insisted upon coming to England. Then I wrote a reassuring letter to Lina pointing out that as they would of course stay with me she really ran no more danger than at Sapoli. Also neither she nor Antoine knew any one in London, and spoke but little English. All this made for safety. My house, too, was so small that two visitors left no space for further hospitalities. Altogether I hoped for the best — from her point of view.

I met them on the dismal platform at Victoria, and was struck with Antoine's appearance. He was so full of high spirits, and his health seemed completely restored. Lina, on the other hand, looked white and her eyes were sunken as though she had not slept for several nights. She looked much older than her husband, although as a matter of fact he was three or four years her senior.

The next day was Sunday; and although I had filled my house with flowers, all my efforts could

not make the London streets look otherwise than dismal to foreign eyes. Lina, dead tired, remained upstairs; Antoine, as cheerful as though a London Sunday were the liveliest of festivals, joined me in the sitting-room, and reminded me that from three to four on Sunday afternoon an ancient relative commanded my company. You see my friends knew all about my habits! He said that he would accompany me to the house, and that he would wait in the motor or drive about until my visit was finished, as he enjoyed hearing the sounds of the London streets. I pointed out that upon a Sunday he would not hear much; but he replied that it would be Pandemonium compared to the peace that brooded always over Sapoli.

The plan was carried out, and when I rejoined him in the car at the conclusion of my visit I found him awaiting me in the highest state of excitement.

He exclaimed, "This is the happiest day of my life except the day upon which I first met Lina," but refused to tell me anything until we reached Chelsea Embankment, suggesting that we should get out and walk there. Then he explained.

In the summer when they left Sapoli for three weeks to get into cooler air, they had gone upon a motor tour. It appeared that one night Lina went straight to bed on arriving at an inn after a particularly tiring day, so that Antoine dined alone. A stranger at another table having offered his help

to guide him from the room afterwards, introduced himself as — marvellous coincidence — Professor Siegmann.¹ An enthusiast about his profession he questioned Antoine closely about his eyes. Antoine told him all he knew: that his eyesight had never been as good as that of other people, and that continual overwork and strain had resulted in a nervous breakdown, after which he had become totally blind. Cataract was the cause, and no less than three oculists had pronounced his case hopeless. Herr Siegmann took a different view. He urged Antoine to go back to his quiet, healthy life in the hills to get himself as fit and strong as possible, and then to meet him in London, where he was to be during the following year, and he would consider the possibility of an operation.

“But why?” I asked, “did he make you wait so long? You could have gone to him at Schlossburg in the winter.”

“You see,” replied Antoine simply, “it was because of Lina, I decided that she must know nothing; the suspense would be too awful for her; and he could not speak at all definitely until he saw me again — with all his instruments. Now what excuse could I make to her for rushing off to Schlossburg in the winter, more especially when you were coming out to us,” he added affectionately. “So we agreed that she should know nothing, and it was

¹ Under his real name a world-famed oculist.

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quite easy to propose a visit to you this year. Then I arranged for him to examine me to-day. Lina would never suspect that I was to see a doctor on Sunday. I made the hotel waiter in Paris write the letter to him at my dictation when Lina had gone to bed. And this afternoon, from three to four I knew that you were always busy and — and —” his voice broke a little, “there is hope: he is to operate on Wednesday.”

Only one thought possessed me.

“And you kept silence all last winter, and you might have *seen* six months ago!”

“It was not sure,” he said gently; “and what has Lina not given up for me?”

I could not speak for a minute.

Suddenly a horrible fear rose before me, and I was confronted with the thought of Lina’s secret.

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That evening before dinner I told Antoine that of course the operation must take place in my house, and secondly, I implored him to let me tell Lina the good news. To my surprise, he welcomed the second suggestion as warmly as the first. It transpired that he had dreaded telling her because he was afraid that he would not lay enough emphasis upon the fact that *perhaps* the operation might not succeed; then the good news might upset her; he might be clumsy and he could not see if she should.

turn faint. In short he was afraid of telling her of news that seemed too good to be true.

This conversation took place in my studio, and, as he finished, the curtain in the doorway was drawn aside and a face appeared ghastly white, from which all life had fled; a mask in which the eyes had turned to stone. For one moment and then — the curtain dropped again into its place. "What was that?" asked Antoine quickly. "Nothing," I answered. "A ghost!" he exclaimed, laughing.

The ghost of poor Lina's happiness.

Somehow I got him away, somehow I found myself with her in the studio. She spoke in a hoarse whisper (her voice seemed to have broken) and quite lifelessly.

"I must think it out," she kept repeating. "If I could be only sure of Antoine's focus."

"What do you mean?" I heard myself say.

"Why this, there is his eyesight, there is his music, there is me. Now I must get them all into their proper places."

"My dear Lina, surely you exaggerate. He worships you; and he will always worship you. You harp upon beauty — he must have seen heaps of pretty women in the past, yet he never married until he met you."

"Marriage," she laughed bitterly, "do you suppose I think anything of that? Do you not suppose that I should have been perfectly happy as his

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mistress, or his servant — anything so long as he was mine! He loved his work, his life: — everything was snatched from him. Then, when he sat in darkness, he heard my voice. I held him, I was everything. But I was *out of focus*. You love to hear nightingales sing; but if you are shut up yourself — a prisoner — the song of the humblest bird in the garden sounds lovelier than any nightingale. Now, if the operation succeeds, he will have his music, the world, beautiful women. How can you say that I exaggerate, that I harp upon beauty? Beauty and youth means so much to some people; especially to the artistic temperament. You have that temperament, Antoine has it, I have it. That is why we understand each other so well. If I were even young, for youth is never quite ugly! But I never had any real youth: my life only began when Antoine entered it — do you realise that I am not thinking only of my wretched self; it is for Antoine — the blessed sight given back and yet ——”

“If the operation succeeds,” I heard myself repeat mechanically.

“If the operation succeeds,” she repeated in the hoarse whisper, and then taking my hand and looking me straight in the eyes she said, “And, George, we will both pray upon our knees to-night that it will succeed.”

The next morning they asked me where they could find a Catholic church. When they were gone, I

telephoned to the doctor about the arrangements; and as he cannot speak English with any success, his secretary came round to see me and to choose the room. I took down his directions: the studio had fortunately just submitted to whitewash and tidying up, for he chose that at once because of the light.

"It will only take half an hour," he remarked in the same tone that a stationmaster uses about the journey from Waterloo to Epsom. "The nurse shall come round this afternoon and prepare it."

He remained talking hopefully, trying to cheer me up about the morrow: speaking of Herr Siegmann and the miracles he wrought. He had hardly gone before I heard the car return. They came straight into the sitting-room together, and as they entered that delightful sense of comradeship between them struck me again. They were so entirely "together" in what they said and did, one could not fancy them apart even in thought. Surely he would forgive her!

Then I noticed that his face was changed — the excitement had gone; he looked perfectly serene, completely happy. She, too, seemed calm: her voice had not come back, but the horrible, unnatural tension was broken.

We sat at luncheon, and, oddly enough, I was the only one who appeared constrained. The others talked and laughed, although Lina's laugh was

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more like a husky croak. Did I forget to say that she had a delicious laugh, low and very soft as though she had not long learnt the use of laughter?

Several times she spoke of his coming independence, almost as if she was forcing herself to speak of it. All through the meal she kept it up, eating nothing but talking gaily; only once did she betray herself. It was when Antoine expressed his one absorbing thought: "Et demain je te verrai pour la première fois!"

She said nothing, but quite suddenly her fingers resting on the arm of her chair tightened, so that I saw the knuckles starting out white against the skin, and her eyes filled with tears as she laid the other hand lightly over his.

After lunch he went upstairs to unpack his violin. We listened to his ascending steps until the tune he was humming — one of her songs — died away; and then we turned into the sitting-room.

"I can see more clearly now, George," she said. "I have confessed and received absolution. It is years since I went to church: when one is happy one is content to thank God in one's heart; when one is unhappy one hurries to cast one's burden before Him. I have made up my mind. Did you hear Antoine? He is taking up the threads of life again; soon I shall belong to the past: he will not miss me."

"Good heavens, Lina, what do you mean to do?"

"Now, George, unless you promise to listen I shall not tell you. You do not understand half-breeds like me: you are clean bred. I am half French, half Italian, and a bastard at that! Mongrels have far more excitable feelings than other dogs: they are violent in their affections and dislikes, and they are always miserably sensitive; which is why they are usually unhappy. But they have one compensation. I do not think that they cling very much to life: they become indifferent to a fate that is usually unkind.

"I had no right to the perfect happiness I have enjoyed all these years. I fought for it and lied for it, and now I must give it up. Ugly as I am I have had a perfect lover and"—here she laid her beautiful hands on my arm—"a dear brother. But I stole my lover with a trick, and I must give him up. I know now that we are meant to follow cruel, dull, brutal Truth, otherwise we are punished. I am not sorry," here she threw back her head, "and I am going to take my punishment when the time comes. *But I am going to take it in my own way.* Not by seeing the disgust in Antoine's face. No! I will give my treasure away; I will not have it taken from me. Think—even my voice seems to have gone!"

"Then what will you do?" I asked, powerless before her resolve—just as I am powerless to produce an adequate translation of what she said (why,

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I could not even write down the French words as she said them!) "Do you mean to kill yourself?"

"I cannot see my way yet, but it will come. I only know one thing; he must never see my face."

The nurse was announced at this moment, and I went and saw her and arranged all the prosaic details necessary at such a moment. When I returned Antoine was sitting holding his violin, caressing it softly with his long, thin fingers, and Lina was rearranging some flowers in a bowl. They were as usual talking together, and I was at once admitted into their discussion.

"I was saying," remarked Antoine, "that our religion is so comforting because it tells one exactly what to do. No doubt your Protestant religion is excellent in its way," he remarked politely, "but it reminds me of a governess, rather austere, although just, who says, 'Now you are growing up, and must have greater liberty. You must think for yourselves and, so long as you do not commit any great sin against the Commandments, I am all for your criticising and judging independently.' Now our Church is like a kind old nurse, who draws the child to her knee and says: 'You will do so and so, and pray for so and so, you are to live like this, and die like that, and then afterwards I know exactly what is going to happen to you. And if you refuse to obey, or disbelieve wilfully, no jam or butter (as the case may be) and severe penance!'"

"You destroy your own case," interrupted Lina. "Your comparison defeats you: in spite of yourself the Protestant Church is superior to the Catholic since the schoolroom is more advanced than the nursery."

"Does progress invariably mean improvement?" asked Antoine.

"You think then that religion should always treat us as children?" I put in.

"I think so," he replied. "You see we must always feel young when we, so to speak, 'feel religiously.' That is so comforting. The Church is so much older than we are, and must know more — be wiser. Just as one's old nurse was more wise, and all our childhood's memories gather round Mass on Sundays, and the stories of the saints. I shall never see" — he paused and smiled — "my patron saint without thinking how I licked his robe when I was a small child at home to discover if the paint would come off like ordinary secular paint. And I like to confess now, as I used to confess in the nursery, and be forgiven. It is all so homelike."

"I hate to be told what to do by a man, however good, who probably knows nothing about me," said Lina.

"He ought to if you confess properly," laughed Antoine, lying back in his chair. "But women are always rebels, particularly attractive women — they are usually the most unreasonable. It is the clever

women who reason, and they are almost always ugly. There are exceptions," he added lazily, and looked towards the corner whence her voice came.

"Poor things," she answered bitterly.

"Why poor things? They do not mind; their intelligence, their talents compensate for their lack of beauty."

"How stupid men are," rejoined Lina scornfully, "as if all *that* was worth one little kiss! I knew a woman who was a great actress. She could do what she liked with her audience; could make them laugh one moment, and cry the next, and twist them round her little finger, and she was the unhappiest of women — because no one loved her."

"Why, dear, you are too sympathetic, or you would know that for a woman to be unloved means simply that she cares so much for power and influence that she ceases to attract in that way."

"Oh, no," answered Lina, "she cared nothing for that. And I am not carried away by sympathy because, although I was very sorry for her, I never liked her. No, it was simply that she was so hideous."

"Now, Lina, you *must* be exaggerating. There is an ugliness that is fascinating. Describe her to me."

Lina rose softly and stood looking into a glass that hung opposite, on the wall, as she spoke.

"No, there was no fascination about her.

Imagine drab-coloured hair with grey wisps hanging round a thick, ill-moulded face. Then she had little, soulless eyes; the sort of eyes that look flat when they smile, and dull when they cry, and invisible eyebrows. Her mouth — I remember that particularly — was shapeless and lifeless: a mouth that no man could kiss *unless with his eyes shut*, a thick, sallow skin, a clumsy figure, and ——”

“Oh stop, Lina,” laughed Antoine. “Your vivid imagination runs away with you as usual. There would be nothing left for such a woman, poor thing, except to run away and hide herself.”

“Yes,” answered Lina quietly as, turning, she moved towards the door, “that is all there would be left for her to do — poor thing.”

III

The next morning was glorious; the river lay blue and glittering in the sunlight, and everywhere joy danced upon the air.

“What a day to begin Antoine’s new life,” said Lina, coming downstairs, and, as she said it, I noticed that her voice had returned.

“I think it was want of sleep,” she explained. “Last night I took a sleeping draught, and I feel quite different. By this afternoon my darling will see the sun again, and this evening the stars: the same stars that we used to see from the verandah at

dear Sapoli. Or can one not see the stars in London?" she laughed teasingly.

Antoine was condemned to rise late and to remain quiet. I went and interviewed the nurse, a capable-looking woman, who lamented that neither husband nor wife could speak English properly.

"He is very good-looking," she remarked. "I do not know when I have seen such a beautiful face — curious why he should have married such a plain-looking wife: but they often do. And is it not odd that the one thing he looks forward to seeing is her face? He talks of nothing else in his broken English. I suppose he knows what she is like to look at?" she continued, looking at me sharply.

"He ought to do so and from the most cruelly unfavourable description," I replied, thinking of last night; "only please agree with him in thinking her beautiful: it is a fancy of his. You see he knows her as she really is, and so he does not mind."

"I see," she answered, not doing so in the least; but she hid a sentimental heart beneath a severely capable exterior.

Later on I saw Lina upon her way to the studio. She had often confided to me her horror of surgery; the very name made her shudder and, knowing that everything was ready there for what was to take place, I went to call her back. But as I reached the doorway I realised that she had come on purpose. I saw her look round the room at the tables and ask

the nurse some question; and then she stooped and kissed the place where his head was to rest, and made the sign of the cross.

And then it was time to fetch Antoine. I heard her say, "Now I am come to lead you down for the last time; after this you will need no guide."

I grasped his hand as he made me promise to stay in the sitting-room with her while it was going on. "They say that in quite a short time, perhaps even ten minutes after it is over, I shall be able to see Lina. The nurse has promised to come and fetch her at once." Then leaving them together, I went out.

Lina and I stood by the window looking unconsciously at the river. She had not said one word further about her resolve to drop out of our lives, but this did not make me less uneasy, for I realised that this was probably in order that I should know nothing when Antoine asked me afterwards. If she did go, I felt certain she would kill herself: she would not be content with the uncertainty of concealment.

You see the danger lay in the fact that she was utterly indifferent to death. Instinctively I put out my hand and grasped her wrist as though to force her to remain; and yet, even as I did this I felt that, with every door bolted and barred, she would surely go if she were resolved. Perhaps she guessed my thoughts, for she smiled, and without turning her

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eyes from the river, she said, "Dear George, I love you for being so sorry for us." (Even then she could not realise that any one should be sorry for her alone.)

The half-hour was endless. I never knew that the clock ticked so loud before.

The wait became intolerable and, lacking her self-control, I began pacing up and down. How old the carpet looked — I must get another — and the furniture, everything was worn out. Always, through it all, I was trying to think: what could I do? How could I prevent the tragedy. If I could only help — but how? I know quite well now what it feels like to be going mad. There must be some way out. My God, is there no way?

And even then God had found a way. Steps were coming down the passage, sounding miles off, seeming as though they would never reach the door? The handle turned and the nurse appeared. I sprang towards her, and her words hardly reached my brain. I caught something — chance fragments. "He died under the anæsthetic — the doctor says a terribly nervous, excitable system, the heart suddenly failed. Break it to her gently."

Then suddenly the nurse's professional manner melted. "O, sir, and after all," she exclaimed crying, "he never saw her face."

JOBISKA AND THE WAGON

I

And his aunt Jobiska made a dish
Of eggs and buttercups fried in fish.

E. LEAR.

THAT is why my half-sister is nicknamed Jobiska: because the family say that "she has no order, no method," and would for ever be making experiments like the lady in Lear's poem. I am some years her senior and, upon returning from India with my regiment, the Family met in conclave and entrusted me with a mission. It seemed that she had taken to caravanning; that she had caravanned not once nor twice but repeatedly — that she was about to commit the offence yet again. Now there is caravanning and caravanning! There is the gypsies' way, and there is the amateur's way; the first is beside the point, and the second may be cleanly and even luxurious, and the Family wished to know what Jobiska's way really was! It could not understand why she resolutely refused to take a female friend — "some really nice girl," and deploring vagabondage in all forms, it particularly feared that this strange taste might "do a girl

harm." In chaperon's language this means "might injure her chances of matrimony."

Now Jobiska had passed through several engagements (answering closely to the military definition of the word); and her affairs seemed to be in the same state of chaos as everything connected with her always is. The Family trusted to time and "judicious management," proposing indeed that the quality of management should be so coated with the sugar of tact that its astringent flavour should be unsuspected.

I naturally stipulated that I should have no hand in these intrigues, and was told that nothing would be expected of me in this direction. Jobiska was to have her autumn expedition in the wagon, upon one condition: that I should accompany her! Stupefaction prevented reply; and indeed this was unnecessary, for the voice of authority continued without a pause to expound the reason for this amazing project. (1) My presence would provide chaperonage; "Jobiska has gone caravanning with one of her brothers: a delightful arrangement!"—that would sound perfect. (2) I should be able to describe upon my return Jobiska's mode of life. (3) I could perhaps "use my influence" and, during our conversations—since we could not spend the day in complete silence—persuade her that this was a foolish and passing craze, and that the sooner it passed the better.

Well, of course, I speak of the Family as "it," because this is a strictly anonymous story (even the dogs have assumed names); but still I may add that "it" is a collective manner used in speaking of several individuals; and that all these have the bewildering habit of speaking in chorus when strongly moved. So I took the only course: silence and retreat in search of Jobiska. She was not visible, but as she uses brown hairpins I was able to track her to her room. It was not so easy to enter for, upon the door opening, a small but agitated French maid, three or four large white dogs, and two cats, burst out like shots fired from a gun. Inside, Jobiska was surveying the contents of an open cupboard — and I gave her a report of the family council. "Well, anyhow, it is only on one condition this time," she said; "usually it is three: firstly, to wear Jaeger pyjamas at night, secondly, to write, telegraph, or telephone once every day, and, thirdly, to come back perfectly well. I expect," gloomily, "that the others will be thrown in too." "But," I began, "of course I said nothing for fear of your holiday being knocked on the head. But *really* am I?" "No," she replied decisively, "very few men like it at all, and very few men *or* women enjoy themselves on my muddy lines. There would be no room for you and your things in Edward's tent, and as for your hiring another wagon, you would simply hate it. You are used to war and camping out, but like all

soldiers you would not see the amusement of tramping about England. I have a splendid idea. You shall be *with* the party, but not *of* the party." I sat heavily upon the bed — "Explain." "You will take your little motor and Brown,¹ you will sleep at inns and dart upon us at any time. The Family wants to know what I do; well you can write it all down if you like: every detail of my blameless life. I will simply love having you, and you can answer the questions people always ask at home — when one gets back." "In fact, be Boswell to your Johnson?" "That kind of thing, whatever it is," replied my step-sister, knowing perfectly well. "You see you are in love, so that it will be a nice diversion for you; and as you are not allowed to see or write to 'her' it will keep your mind from gloom."

At this moment the maid looked in and vanished. "She is very agitated because she and the chef have been quarrelling — you see they are engaged." I said that this seemed hardly sufficient reason. "Well, they occasionally burst out into a quarrel. She told me this morning 'we disputed ourselves like rag-pickers.' But now that everything is settled, and I know you want to go and try the new horse, I shall draw up a few rules for *you*."

Upon my return I found a large envelope in my

¹ My servant and would-be chauffeur. As Jobiska said: "He does not understand a motor, but then he does clean a stylographic pen so beautifully."

room. It contained a form awaiting my signature, and consisted of a variety of what appeared to be clauses.

“ I promise faithfully:

“ Not to attempt to join the wagon until 11 A. M. (we do not like to be delayed packing up).

“ Never to offer to help my relative; although I consider her task ‘ too much for her ’ (you will only hinder her).

“ Never to offer to help Edward (you will only hinder him).

“ Never to give advice (you will only annoy us).

“ On no account ever to share any meal with us — except tea (and then only when invited).

“ Never to make remarks upon what we are eating.

“ Only to take authorised photographs.

“ Never to offer to buy things for us.

“ Not to appear to know us unless permitted (it might cause unpleasant complications).

“ (If you don’t sign this you will spoil my holiday).

(Signed) JOBISKA.”

After this what was I to do? I signed.

I found Jobiska down before the others when I went in to the rather gloomy room in which we meet before dinner at home. She seized the paper

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and thrust it "down her neck," as she expressed it; and then embraced me warmly.

Shortly afterwards she started. I was to let her get three days ahead, as she had to get round and out of London. When the Family clearly understood that neither Piccadilly nor Bond Street were on the line of route, they saw justice in Jobiska's plea for three days "law."

Tracking the wagon was rather an amusing game, for although it would seem that it could hardly pass unperceived, yet it is surprising what hunts I used to have. They would turn up a green lane for lunch while I would fly wildly past, scouring the surrounding country; or they would keep prudently to the high road while I took a short cut. I ran them to earth first beyond Northaw.

It was quite early, long before the hour mentioned on the paper I had signed; so I crawled away again unobserved. I had come upon the camp quite by chance as I was taking a walk before breakfast, and honour forbade my looking over the hedge, but I heard Jobiska say: "Two hundred times you crowed straight off before the sun rose. Beast! And you can't even teach the hens to lay proper eggs. *There!*" And something gleamed as it fell through the air (obviously a false egg). She was evidently in no sunny mood.

But first I must explain who "they" were. Be-

sides Jobiska there was Edward: Edward is a retired chauffeur who is now a farmer. How he manages to leave his farm I cannot tell you; he hates motors (in spite of having driven and won several races before becoming head chauffeur to the Family), loves horses, and is what is known as an all-round handy man. In appearance he resembles the pictures of pirates with grey hair, black bushy eyebrows and sharp features. Then there is the Horse. Here is where Jobiska differs from most other caravanners; for he is a heavy shire horse. He comes off the Home Farm where they have named him, fancifully enough, Fairy Prince. Behind the wagon walk three large white woolly dogs from the Pyrenees: Mascarou, Toto his son, and Lisette, a female acquaintance—no relation. Jobiska says that they are faultless specimens; and although she may be prejudiced (as she breeds them and sells them), still they are beautiful creatures. Neither beauty nor intelligence, however, can save them from being chained to the wagon when motors are to be met with. Oddly enough dogs seem naturally to prefer following close behind the wagon, and if loosed will run back under the "crutch" again; but, of course, it is not safe to trust to that. Along quiet lanes where they were allowed loose, any passer-by or child could pat or touch them, but when on guard no one dared approach the wagon; as chaperons they combined efficiency with a rare tact!

The afternoon was lovely — after a scorching summer the fields lay dried up and the colour of sponge — but along this road bordered with bracken and shaded by tall trees everything wore an almost spring green. “We have heard of a lovely ‘pitch,’” remarked Jobiska, “somewhere near Collier’s End.” When we reached it the place fully justified the description: a lovely open space, knee-deep in bracken, near by a wood, and, for the rest, open to the sunset. *The Horse* (no one called him by his frivolous name, and he was spoken of in a manner that demands a capital letter) was munching peacefully at a little distance; Edward’s abode (the tent) was up, and a cheerful frizzling announced preparations for supper!

Jobiska was very busy peeling potatoes, and in enforced idleness I sat on the step and talked to her. “Have you hidden the motor away somewhere?” she asked. “You see motors are the natural enemies of wagons, and it looks so silly to mix them up together. I thought perhaps that you might like to take down a few questions: they are the ones that the Family always ask when I get back.

- “1. What do you do all day?
- “2. Don’t you envy people in motors?
- “3. Do you wash?
- “4. What is your food like, and do you have enough?
- “5. Who does your hair?

"6. I hope that you are considerate to Edward, and that you sometimes hire some one to help him do the washing-up?"

"7. Isn't the wagon horribly stuffy at night?"

"And the answers?" I asked. "The questions will answer themselves as we go along. I mean that as you see what happens you will be able to write down the answers in much nicer English than I could."

I must say that I should have liked to ask several of those questions myself. Jobiska had always suffered terribly from absence of mind: a malady which resulted in the general confusion already referred to; diligent house-maids found a stern joy in "tidying" the old nursery which had been allotted to her as sitting-room; books, papers, personal belongings of all kinds lie there like snow in the most unlikely places.

Not wishing to be unkind, I hardly dared look into the wagon. But she had finished the potatoes, and Edward was peering at them, as they lay ready for cooking in the saucepan, with a curious silent contempt.

"Edward is terribly critical," remarked Jobiska in front of him, "he loves finding fault. He would simply enjoy taking all those potatoes out again and peeling them in front of me." Edward was heard to mutter to himself something about "eyes and no eyes," as he swooped back into the tent. "All nonsense," she said, "I never left a single 'eye' in one;

I should not dream of doing such a thing; come and have a look at the wagon; do you mind just wiping your boots?" This from Jobiska! We entered, and I confess to some surprise; for everything was as neat as a new pin. Of course, I had seen it before — but never "in commission" so to speak: to the left of the door was a little wardrobe, then a kitchen range — a complete one in miniature with nickel fittings. "It is quite perfect," remarked Jobiska, "so of course it comes from Scotland"; over the range was a cistern and tap, "so that your water is boiling while your food is cooking." Then a locker containing a military folding bath and basin and washing-stand, all in canvas. Above this was a corner shelf on which stood matches, etc., and by it hung a candle yacht-lamp, warranted not to upset or turn upside down. Across the end of the wagon was Jobiska's bed. This was simple; consisting as it did of the wooden top of the chest of drawers. It occupied the whole of the wagon's width (about six feet), and was about three feet wide. Upon it was a horse-hair mattress covered by a rug, then what soldiers call a flea-bag, *i.e.* a large bag made of the softest of blankets sewn together — into which you creep. "As delicious as silk and so warm and light; much nicer than cold sheets," and a snowy pillow. The whole thing was covered and tucked in by a new grey horse-blanket. Another candle lamp swung in the corner, and from the bed to the cup-

board (opposite the aforementioned wardrobe) ran a locker, with drawers underneath ending in a cupboard near the door, whose upper half contained china and cutlery, the lower sauce-pans. I forgot to say that three bookshelves were fixed to the wall at the foot of the bed.

"It is too hot to-night to light the fire, so Edward has got Beatrice in the tent," remarked Jobiska.¹ "The three windows are two feet by three square, so question number seven answers itself here and now; and as this is what is called a single skin wagon (only half an inch thick) the air seems to 'breathe' through it always. There is no feeling like waking up after a good night here. The last two I have been awakened at 4 A. M. because the Horse *would* come and bump into the end of it, which of course is my bed, and nearly shot me off on to the floor. We were on stubble, so he thought he would like an extra early nosebag." "Not unnaturally." "Well, he had had as much as ever he could eat last thing, sir," observed Edward as he passed the steps, "corn and beans and what not — the very best, because I took all the forage that we had from the Home Farm when we started, and I saw I got the best; but that Horse could get outside a haystack" (this with fond pride as he shook up and refilled a second supply for him).

¹ I must explain that Beatrice is a well-known make of oil-stove.

"It is a horrid feeling when a cart-horse bumps into you at night," continued Jobiska, "just as if some vulgar person dug you in the ribs with their elbow to show you the point of a joke. And the worst of it is that if you leave this particular Horse loose at night he never lies down; the only time he ever does is between the shafts." This sounded unpleasant. "It is," she agreed, "that is why they said that they did not want him any more at the gardens, and sent him to the Home Farm. But he is such a darling otherwise, and what should we be like if we only had one fault?" "Awful prigs." "Yes, but until then we have no right to criticise him," and now I was hustled off to the inn.

The next day I spent the morning in the study of Stonewall Jackson, with the view to a military examination. It was in the early afternoon that I came upon the wagon. Jobiska was sitting by the roadside waiting for the trace horse which she had captured, and which was to appear in a few minutes.

When he arrived, in charge of a carter, a fearful hill was negotiated. The wagon from its light colour appears larger than it is (fortunately); also "artillery wheels" make it run very easily, and a full lock turns it on its own axis. (Jobiska always calls the wagon "she" by the by.) With my own amazed eyes have I seen the Horse trotting of his own free will along a level road, and a cart-horse does not often do that even when drawing an empty cart!

I must say that the spurt did not last long; but neither was it encouraged in any way: "Slow and sure" is even more useful here than in other walks of life. When they reached a downward slope, Edward climbed up, dived into the wagon, and absorbed himself in the task of changing lamp candles and of establishing Beatrice in comfort upon the floor, with the object of boiling the kettle for tea (the hill had lasted about continuously for two and a half miles). Trace horse and carter had left — rewarded and thanked, and I learned from Jobiska that the latter had been a London shopkeeper for years, and that he had chosen this far happier — if humbler — position on account of a delicate wife.

Jobiska climbed up and took the reins, I being allowed to occupy the other box-seat (both are lockers, one a coal box, the other the resting-place of Beatrice), and the curious thing was that once there I seemed to have dropped into another world.

"Don't stoop down without thinking," said Jobiska, "or the Horse will catch you across the face with his tail, which stings awfully. It is much too long, but the flies are such a nuisance."

It was a most curious sensation, that stepping from a motor to a caravan. Your point of view alters entirely, you focus things differently: progress, views, modern life, all vanish, and you are in a new world — a world of little things, through which you saunter, continually amused by a million scenes and

incidents which vanish and dissolve like soap bubbles the moment you write them down. That is why this account is so flat and uninteresting, because I found that, from the moment I took part in it, I had undertaken more than I bargained for — caravanning in the true sense of the word: its charm is indescribable; just as all charm is indescribable.

At this moment Jobiska said, as if guessing my thoughts, "You see things don't happen in the ordinary sense of the word — you don't want them to happen. You start from home tired and very likely cross, and then gradually you feel as if you were being stroked into content again. It is just as though you plunged into another life where quite different things matter (that is why it is such a rest). You have no time to think about Sorrow and Death, and the awful black fear that sometimes comes over one for no reason at all — a fear of the future, perhaps, and of people stopping caring for you; when you have to hurry and find a pitch because the horse is tired, or keep a sharp look out for a baker because, if you miss him, there will be no bread either for supper or for breakfast next day. And then you seem to become friends with every one at once; in the open country all the people speak to you, and they are delightful, and if your friends pass by they never by any chance recognise you."

This caused me less surprise than it did to Jobiska: she was dressed in a coat and skirt, beloved, because

of old (apparently very old) association. Her hat was, she assured me "a simple canotier," but as she confessed that the first few hours of a new trip had never passed without her sitting on whatever hat she had started with, it now resembled a still more simple plate. Her feet were even more different from the appearance which they wore in ordinary life. Jobiska's feet were of the ordinary average size, but in addition to stockings she wore a thick pair of men's shooting socks (after the manner of ski enthusiasts), and then very thick, square-toed, hob-nailed boots. She explained that, having a very tender skin, this arrangement allowed her to walk the whole day without jarring her feet or feeling tired.

"Now look down the road," she continued, "there is nothing behind us but two old ladies walking. In front you will observe an ancient person driving a cart — our slow pace will not alter, neither will his. As a rule, you would scarcely notice him, but anything interests you when you find it becoming part of your landscape. Do you see the way in which he is perched like a bird upon the edge of the barrel? Well, he will probably stay without moving while his horse walks on and on just in front of us for ages." This was instantly falsified by the old man — fast asleep — tumbling backwards into the barrel. His horse continued walking while two corduroy legs kicked wildly from the tub; Edward rushed from the

wagon, and we went to help the victim whom we found entirely unhurt.

"And," said Edward soothingly, "a nice empty barrel too. Just think of the awful waste if it had been beer."

"Baint so sure I would have bruk my 'eart if it 'd bin beer," replied the old person. "'Taint my bar'l."

"He 'll keep awake after this," prophesied Edward, grinning broadly, as we pulled off the road for tea. During the incident a milk cart had passed and sold Jobiska some milk, so that there was no delay in the meal. She says that breakfast and tea are the most delightful of meals caravanning; dinner and supper you eat, because like wolves and sharks you *must*. But caravan breakfast (alas! forbidden to me by that signed paper) and tea are beyond description. Fresher tea and more boiling water than drawing-rooms ever see, in a real brown teapot with a neat basket in its spout to catch the leaves, and bread (fresh where possible) and home-made cake (I confess brought from home!) and excellent jam. A deck chair, folding table, and coloured check-cloth were brought out, and the tea-things laid upon it with immense care. I discovered that I was meant to use these, as Jobiska found herself unable to enjoy the feast except flung upon the grass, and — must I add — drinking from what was clearly the slop-basin. Edward removed his share to the

"crutch," and the three dogs, having the whole world to choose from, curled up under the wagon and pretended that they were *not* waiting for scraps. I lay back lazily, exclaiming, "Well, if this is caravanning, no one could have much objection to it. Are there ever any ups and downs?"

"Edward, do we ever have any ups and downs?" called Jobiska. A prolonged chuckle came from the "crutch," but I could extract no more from either of them.

I left to go on and make my arrangements for the night; and found an inn about two miles from where they were going to pitch the tent; alas, I found it only just in time. For that — motor went hopelessly wrong on the way, and had to be ignominiously dragged into the inn yard by a rope and three willing but slightly intoxicated men who happened to be in the bar at the time. After dinner I strolled out in the direction of the camp; the deep-throated baying of the dogs gave me away long before I came into the light of the carriage lamps. Jobiska's voice welcomed me saying: "I knew it was you, because I recognised those nice cigars you smoke; the dogs knew you too, but they never will let any one come near at night." She came out into the light, Toto's large woolly body wriggled contentedly, Mascarou laid an adoring head against her hand, and Lisette snuffled with excitement.

It appeared that Jobiska was washing-up behind

the wagon; the crutch is the piece of wood that lets up and down with chains, and is most useful at all times. She had all the china arranged on it.

"So now you see question six answers itself (as to who does the washing-up), and they need not worry about Edward."

"Don't you hate it?"

"How could I," she asked, "out here?"

Around her the washing-up water danced in the starlight, and it seemed as though the moon had fallen into the pail that stood by her side — so completely was it reflected in the water. It was a baby moon, quite new. Jobiska's eyes followed mine. "Fancy, if I could really catch the new moon in that pail, what luck I should have for ever and ever." She sighed, and suddenly a handful of spoons dropped with a clatter on the grass. In defiance of rules I stooped to pick them up and — clumsy owl — knocked my head with a bump against the crutch. When I was up again Jobiska had recovered cheerfulness.

"That would turn anything into poetry," she remarked, and pointed to the sky with the fork she was drying. "Every one and everything seems given their hour of romance — just look at this paddock. In the daytime it is burnt up — no grass, nothing — with a hideous building-land notice planted up in the centre, and advertisements defacing the palings; in fact we only stopped here because we were forced:

the Horse wanted a rest after all those hills, and then water was close. But look at it now." Now the poor little paddock was like an island in a dream.

It seemed to me that they had been later pitching their camp than I had calculated, and I began to chaff Jobiska upon their slowness. She took it with calm, until I began to mock at the Horse's capacity for speed, then she disclosed immediately the real reason for the delay. It transpired that she had invented a pretext for pulling up because she had found that they were unconsciously dogging the footsteps of two bashful country lovers who were struggling, arm in arm, to outwalk the Horse — and in vain. For at least a mile they had maintained the desperate effort, but each time that they gained a few yards he would overtake them, his heavy tread breaking upon the silence of the evening, and the wagon lamp dispelling the kindly dusk. "And they were so young and shy and nice!" said Jobiska. "I would not hurry the Horse at the end of the day's work, but I could pull him up, and I did. It seemed cruel to shorten the happiest time of their lives, even by half an hour — before they marry and she becomes a drudge, and he goes all day to work and comes home too tired to speak. They will have nothing to look back on for ever but just this little while between the gloaming and the mirk." From this you may infer that Jobiska's caravanning was not always ordered upon practical lines.

The next day I found myself an exile in London. Brown was left in charge of the derelict car; for three days it would be useless, and Jobiska had firmly declined to give me hospitality and the *entrée* to the tent. Upon the whole she was right; it would, she urged, embarrass and upset Edward, and she would become an anxious hostess and very tiresome in consequence.

At a club I found letters "to be forwarded" from the Family. "Jobiska adores you," one began. (In this narrative I need not leave out the few complimentary references to myself, as nobody knows who I am, and the anonymous cannot be accused of conceit.) "Use your influence with her for good. Talk to her quietly about marriage."

II

Brown telegraphed to me as soon as the repairs were finished, and I fled from London immediately; starting off to hunt the wagon on a lovely early September day. It was boiling hot by eleven o'clock, but our speed brought a fresh wind to our faces, or rather to *my* face, as Brown preferred to crouch on the step and put my suit case beside me on the seat. Upon the top of a long hill I came in sight of the sea, as I followed the road that stretches down into Brancaster, and then turns off along the coast. I caught Jobiska just as I entered Blakeney; the Horse

had just been shod, an operation which had taken an interminable time, as the blacksmith's "mate" was doing something to a steam-boat for reasons best known to himself, and the Horse's feet were too vast for anything ready-made in the shoe line.

"They had to be specially made for him," said Jobiska with some pride (goodness knows why), "just as he always wears his own set of harness, because he has such a sensitive skin. Did you drive all that way with Brown poaching like an egg on the floor? Poor Edward has only just finished luncheon, and it is really almost tea-time."

Edward was stowing away a large joint in the larder. True to etiquette I averted my eyes from it without comment.

"It was delicious," remarked my step-sister with conviction (at home she turns from "red meat" with abhorrence); "he cooked it very well, although he says that he means to put it in the oven again this evening as the heat did not get right through. It was quite tender. Now *I* have no luck cooking; I never knew what the Bible meant by gnashing one's teeth until I tried to eat a cutlet that I had cooked. Edward!" in a higher key, "that motor has been sticking there for half an hour, and the people inside look so miserable. Evidently their chauffeur is an ignomineux; do go and offer to help."

Edward scratched his head and looked at the motor in question; the chauffeur was of that curious

low-caste type to which the motor trade gave birth, and which fortunately has become rare. He evidently tyrannised over his nervous employers, who craned their heads forth from the windows like chickens from a coop, while he looked at them with sinister calm — his cap on the back of a narrow and ill-formed head.

"Blest if I know what is wrong," he said, and it was hardly surprising, since he had taken no steps to find out.

Jobiska clumped towards them.

"Can we be of any use?" she asked. "He," pointing at Edward, "is a first-class mechanic, and has been a head chauffeur for years. Do let him look at your motor's inside."

The ladies chorussed joyful thanks. Their chauffeur murmured audibly to Brown (Edward's devout pupil in the mixed sciences of motor work and boot cleaning) "Hayseed!" jerking his thumb at Edward, and added, "He had far better go away and sit upon a tin tack."

Edward paid no attention: first assuming the general bearing of the consulting physician; he then buried not only his head but the greater part of his torso inside the machine.

Then he emerged, remarking briefly: "Ten minutes will do it," and it did.

Meanwhile Brown beckoned to the chauffeur and in an awestruck whisper detailed Edward's former

position in the automobile world. I heard the Family mentioned just to be brushed aside: to clear the way, as it were, for the names of motor kings with whom Edward had fraternised (whose company he might even now be enjoying if he would), his motor-racing career (which had been very distinguished before he came to us), and the list of prizes that he had won. It is surprising how much talk can be compressed into a few minutes.

"Gosh!" remarked the other, "and why did he quit then?"

"Got bored, and took to farming," said Brown briefly.

"And now goes round the roads with tramps! Well, I suppose we all get our ups and downs; but I don't mind telling you as man to man," and he dropped the attempts at American slang in his earnestness, "that I know more about motors than appears. I broke that machine down, and for why? Catch me trundling round the country at the speed of a perambulator with a lot of——" (his voice lowered here) "when my young lady has this weekend off, with all her people out of town."

Brown, I regret to say, showed some sympathy with and admiration for this daring, and the chauffeur continued: "But," jerking his finger again towards the seat of Edward's trousers (the rest was invisible beneath the car) with new respect, "I wouldn't like him to think I didn't know my business

for all I am tacked on to a lot of ——” Again fate intervened, for Edward arose and, bowing slightly, retreated rapidly towards the wagon — after having accepted an offering from the grateful ladies who had raised a purse for him, so to speak, amongst themselves.

As I joined Jobiska I heard their undaunted chauffeur remarking firmly: “What I advise is that you should stay comfortably at the hotel here while I run up to London and get that spare part I was speaking of — we shall be always breaking down without it, and I shan’t be more than but a very short time.”

We felt powerless, to interfere, and so walked on through the town — past rows of lights and the stentorian voice of a wandering preacher asking: “And would you like to know what I think about St. Peter?” seeming in no way disheartened by the lack of response from busy townspeople, hurrying over the last of their shopping.

I left the wagon safe in camp until Monday morning, and during Sunday we were undisturbed save for a visitor who removed two large rat-traps, politely fearing that they might cause us inconvenience.

We wandered about by the sea in the glorious air, with the curious free and detached feeling that comes from carrying your home with you instead of having to go back at fixed intervals for fixed meals; and, in the evening, Jobiska took me to church. It was the first time that I had attended a place of worship with

her since the day when, during the sermon, the sound of a passionate kiss had startled the whole congregation and was traced to a little girl (of course my step-sister) who was embracing a dormouse which she had unlawfully secreted in the territory known to Abraham as his bosom and to Jobiska as "down my neck," and which had been drawn forth during the duller moments of the service.

We returned to the camp to find Edward busy with supper; and I was just wondering whether the suitable moment would ever arrive upon which to discourse to Jobiska upon the drawbacks of caravaning, as I had been admonished to do, when she said:

"I do hope that you will realise the charm of it all. Do you remember what Stevenson says about, 'that golden doze of the mind.' Perhaps it is this which makes the magic, or else the feeling that one has stepped out of one's own life into another. In any case I do hope that you are not very much bored by coming with me. I love having you to talk to," and Jobiska enfolded me in an affectionate embrace.

It was now that Edward's voice was heard beneath the window grumbling to himself:

"The Horse has gone off: and that means a nice walk for some one (old rascal)!"

Jobiska opened the nearest drawer, caught up what came first to her hand, and rushed off into the darkness. She returned in triumph with her captive, saying: "I will walk back with you on your

way to the inn, and try him with some water as we pass the farm."

We set out together, and I noticed that the patient horse allowed himself to be led by an extemporised collar consisting of the arm of a sky-blue under garment —

"No, the leg," my step-sister corrected me. "There is never any time to lose, and no one notices in the dark. Mind that he does not put his Cinderella foot upon your toes, as we go through the gate."

Night seemed to have thrown a handful of stars across the pond, and the silence was delicious as we stood there; it was as though one realised for a moment the peace which passeth all understanding. But the beauty of the scene seemed to have an unfortunate effect upon the Horse, for he refused to drink and laid a heavy and sentimental head upon Jobiska's shoulder.

Next day we started round the coast of Norfolk, or rather round as much of it as time permitted; and here all coherence again leaves my narrative. I remember long mellow days of sunshine, when we passed along miles of bright green marshes and quiet villages whose red-roofed grey stone houses crowded cheerfully together in sheltered places out of the wind; I remember immense numbers of wonderful churches, and blackberries of a size never seen out of Norfolk. I remember Jobiska running half a mile

to catch a baker "because it offends people to call out 'Baker'" and his name, painted on the cart, happened to be "Bastard"; and her desperate efforts to find fish in fishing villages: at one place being told that "you had ought to have come sooner — there was a couple of eels passing down this street half an hour ago"; which astounding intelligence was proved true by the reappearance of those eels passing up the street again carried by two trippers.

Of course, the tripper season was at its height, and there was a vast difference between the manners of the country people and those of the visitors. These peered inside the wagon at every possible opportunity, and were usually rather trying; fortunately we always knew exactly what they were going to say, so that it was easy to answer.

Tripper. "What lovely dogs!"

Jobiska — pleased smile.

Tripper. "What do you call them?"

Jobiska. "Pyrenean mountain dogs."

Tripper. "What?"

Jobiska repeats.

Tripper. "Might I ask where they come from?"

Jobiska. "The Pyrenees."

Tripper. "I made certain they were St. Bernards," or Great Danes, or bull dogs (or whatever comes into his head at the moment).

It says a great deal for the dogs that they remained unmoved while crowds surrounded them,

even in the hottest weather, in every town we passed; indeed enthusiastic admirers pursued them for miles.

It is amazing how passers-by enjoy petting and praising a perfectly strange and indifferent animal.

I remember long contented afternoons succeeding each other without incident. Upon one occasion we witnessed a lively quarrel between (excursionist) parents and their children: the latter having used the family bath towel to clean the family bicycle just (and this was the point) *just* as the family were all going down to bathe!

Another time we were pursued by the conversation of two young men. These were in a cart proceeding at about our own pace; because there was a large pig squeezed with difficulty into their little vehicle, whom they dared not shake about too much. Their conversation consisted in mimicking a duet between two sheep. I must say that they imitated the bleating very well, but as the road was flat and winding we had it in our ears for the best part of the morning.

I fed the Family with picture postcards of the various places that we did not see, and sometimes Jobiska would climb down and telephone to them. These séances at the telephone took an immense time; usually half an hour's arduous wrestling with the various exchanges ending up with three minutes of spasmodic ejaculation, usually with one of the

servants. Only once did the telephone impart any interesting news.

"My maid's engagement is broken off, I am afraid," remarked Jobiska one day, upon emerging from the stuffy little telephone box in a wayside post office. "They have had a frightful scene. It appears that she went into the kitchen and upset a jug of hot water over the cook's foot (you know he always wears slippers). Upon which, he advanced towards her with folded arms like Napoleon, and said, '*C'est assez! Ange chaste et pure éloigne toi d'ici.*' She says that after calling her *that* everything must be over between them."

III

It had been a very hot summer, and milk was becoming a rare delicacy in some parts of the country. I was now regularly invited to tea, and daily we scoured the neighbourhood at milking time, and of course invariably after a teacupful had been at length obtained the whole country-side blossomed into cows; really fresh butter also was a luxury not always to be found. Well do I recollect entering a shop with Jobiska, and the awful moment when the butter vendor produced an enormous ladle with a sinister yellow fragment upon its extreme end, and implored her to taste and judge of its excellence. What Jobiska and Edward secured in the way of

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food for other meals, it was not, if you remember, permitted that I should discover; but I knew that, in many of the villages, a butcher's shop was not available, and that in large towns "Early Closing" may, at any moment, stare you in the face. They both seemed quite contented; but about the Horse's diet they were extremely "difficile." *He* seemed to do himself uncommonly well; but forage hunts went on unceasingly, and several times Edward thrust a disdainful palm forward filled with samples of forage for my inspection. Three or four daily dog biscuits apiece seemed to suffice the dogs. Upon this simple fare they walked well over two hundred and thirty miles.

I confess that I found the flies maddening; they buzzed round the wagon and crowded inside, but when camping time came flypaper and draughts soon defeated them. I still tried to work for part of the day, and to catch the wagon up when the allotted chapters of dull military textbooks had been wrestled with; I used to leave the motor in Brown's care at a little distance and stalk Jobiska on foot.

Gradually I became an adept at finding her during one of the delays that seemed a matter of course to her and to Edward. You see, they were only two to cope with all the problems of a wandering life, and some of these take time. One thing struck me forcibly: that one is never really alone in the country, unseen eyes mark your comings and goings and news

spreads with inconceivable swiftness. A stranger entering a deserted field may lie down and doze under a hedge, but although the landscape is apparently entirely devoid of life, yet he may be certain that his presence has been notified to the farmer within a few seconds of his arrival, and his clothes and general appearance and probable circumstances commented upon and discussed by people whom he will probably never see himself.

Another interesting point is the faculty all countrymen have for concealing the fact that they are observing you. People say that women can always see without looking, and so can all dwellers on the land; it is a very useful talent and entirely conceals inquisitiveness. For instance, you were always aware of the curiosity of the trippers, but a worker in the fields would probably possess himself of every detail about the wagon while slouching along with his pipe in his mouth, and his eyes apparently fixed on the horizon.

I remember when Edward was filling a pail of water for the Horse, and Jobiska seized the opportunity to trim the animal's tail with a pair of nail scissors. It was the dinner hour, and a labourer lay on the roadside with his back to us, buried in sleep; but hardly had the first black lock fallen, when he was standing by the shaft saying, "Excuse me, but may I keep this?" Jobiska, gratified at what she felt to be a tribute of admiration for the Horse, con-

sented beaming, and he continued affably, "sevenpence a lb. is the price you get for horse hair," and continued to collect what must have been a very poor harvest, since the tail was allowed to remain of abnormal length, owing to the plague of flies.

One Saturday afternoon I hurried after my relative with the cheerfulness induced by the knowledge that my books were safely packed away until Monday. Drama awaited me at the foot of an ominous-looking hill: for Jobiska was talking to an excited policeman, whilst Edward was nowhere to be seen.

"Constable," I said soothingly, "what is all this about?"

"I heard of this van being on the road, sir," he replied, "and thought I might just as well come and ask the lady if she had her dog licences. On the way a man I know meets me and says to me, 'A nice how-dy-do along this here road,' and tells me that the lady left the Horse's nosebag at dinner-time on the ground and sees a man running off with it the minute after. I just cycled up here, and the lady asks me to proceed no further in the matter."

"You see, I am the person who has lost it, and the man may be poor and starving," put in Jobiska.

"The nosebag won't do him no good," interrupted the policeman with a grin, which seemed to annoy her — for she observed with some heat:

"And if I prefer to feed the horse out of my hand like a tame hen, that is entirely my affair."

I hastily took the policeman aside, and pointed out to him that my motor was behind, that the hill was steep for him and his bicycle upon such a hot day, and that I could keep a sharp look-out for the culprit, and telephone back from the next village. I repeated with suspicious energy that I entirely agreed with his views, and that nearly all women were silly and unreasonable.

He departed, but not before he had watched me start up the hill to prove the sincerity of my zeal. Once on the top, I took a lazy and fruitless survey of the country until the wagon joined me.

"And now," Jobiska began, "perhaps you will explain to me why on earth you interfered? It was strictly against the agreement you signed."

Appallingly true! In the excitement that agreement had been forgotten. I promised to do anything to atone.

"Then you must just do nothing, and leave Destiny to take its course."

Apparently she considered herself Destiny, for she opened the door, thereby revealing Edward and an utter stranger sitting side by side like the keepers of the Crown jewels, with the nosebag between them. The stranger appeared embarrassed and needed no second bidding to come out and begone.

"There was such a fuss about nothing, that when that busybody went to tell the policeman," remarked Jobiska, "I bundled the poor man in here (with

Edward to keep an eye on him so that he did not steal anything else). And then, when the policeman appeared, I pretended that the man had made off and that Edward was after him."

Edward had taken part in this adventure with his usual calm; in fact, as a boon companion, Edward was perfect. He never worried, he was of universal use; and a twinkle in his eye showed that the humorous side of the situation invariably appealed to him; he also seemed completely indifferent to time, and sordid landmarks in the day: such as meal-time, bed-time, etc., made no appeal to him. As well as all this, he was shortly to display histrionic talents, as I will describe further on.

We were now turning inland, and although sorry to leave the sea, we all confessed that a little shade after the bare and scorching coast roads was very welcome; but there was plenty of hard walking that morning, as the ground became very hilly.

When I returned from luncheon at the inn, I found, to my horror, that they (I except the Horse) had not yet eaten. Jobiska was observing hungrily, "I like it underdone," and Edward, paying no attention whatsoever, was peering into the oven with an agitated eye.

Tact induced me to snatch a book from the wagon and to light a pipe by the wayside.

The Horse had been taken out and fed; he was looking on with the benign gaze of one who has

lunched extremely well. A couple of workmen — always more at leisure than any one else — came and looked stolidly at the wagon.

“Fine horse,” said one, “not that I owe much to horses; horses in a manner of speaking ruined my life.”

Impressive pause, then (rather an anti-climax).

“What do you think makes my nose so red?”

Inaudible and apparently unsatisfactory reply from his companion.

“I expected it,” remarked the first speaker with bitterness; “I am used to that. I daren’t hardly go into a public for so much as to ask the time! No! I was standing looking at the new horse trough down in the town, when a chap passes, and wishing to be funny, dips me nose in the trough. Result: I get a slight attack of glanders; and the doctor says I never need hope for improvement in the colour. Cost me good jobs too. Believe it or not!”

The other coughed, then added hastily:

“Well, get your courage up and we ’ll go and ask the time at the Unicorn!” and off they lurched together.

Approach of two ladies with poodle.

“Oh! what a sweet caravan! I shouldn’t mind living in one, would you?”

Friend agrees.

“And what do *you* say, Tip?”

Tip says nothing; but the Pyreneans, observing his

approach, emerge from beneath the wagon and say a great deal.

"Oh! what beautiful dogs!" resumed the lady, addressing Jobiska, whose head now appeared from a window. "*Do* tell me are they St. Bernards?"

"Pyrenean mountain dogs," patiently replied my sister.

"Ah! and where do they come from?"

Suitable answer.

"And don't they eat a great deal?" and "Don't you enjoy travelling round the country?"

"Well, you see, we are dog dealers," said Jobiska.

Upon which both ladies drew in their horns, so to speak.

"Ah yes, just so, I wish I could buy one, but you see we have Tip already, and ——"

"You won't have him long, mum, if he keeps poking round the horse's heels like that," broke in Edward's calm voice; and I arose, for evidently the meal was over.

"All this delay is entirely my fault," confessed Jobiska, as we jogged along again. "You see, I found that the chicken had gone high this morning, and we could get nothing until at that last village."

"But why in the name of heaven didn't you lunch with me?"

"Because in the name of heaven (and I don't know what that is) it never entered my head."

And odd as this may seem, I am sure that it had not.

It was a broiling day, and a passing glance at the inside of the wagon showed me that a large purchase of flypaper had been money well spent.

Dust flew at us in clouds: gritting our faces, tumbling down our collars (I speak figuratively regarding Jobiska and Edward, who wore handkerchiefs knotted round their necks in the tramp fashion), and filling our eyes. We were thankful when evening came and the road became less busy. It stretched before us, grey in the soft light which was glowing in the west where a flock of starlings chattered against a lemon sky. It was just the time when civilisation tells us to go in and dress for dinner, and so miss one of the loveliest hours in the fading day. Of course, I was warned that camp would be late that night owing to the delay in the middle of the day.

We were now nearing Ipswich, and a friendly couple walking home from a visit in the neighbourhood told Jobiska of a common where any one could camp without fear of being "moved on."

As usual, they launched into conversation at once, the woman remarking that, by the time they reached home fifteen or sixteen miles would have been covered; but that fortunately her husband would have a good rest next day, as his work (he was a night

watchman) did not begin until the evening, and he had a night off to-night. She herself anticipated but little rest.

"I suppose that the two babies in the perambulator keep you busy," said Jobiska.

"Yes," she answered, "and one other little one at home (there was no room in the pram for him to-day), and eleven birds, and fourteen chickens — and I look after all of them myself."

Asked to particularise the birds she explained, "One goldfinch and ten canaries — I keep the canaries to sell."

"But surely," persisted Jobiska, "canaries come from Norwich?"

"Well, I keep them in Ipswich," said the woman firmly; and at that moment her husband ran up and whispered to Jobiska, "Policeman coming." It was kindly meant, and flattered her *amour propre* as a tramp.

(I was always supposed to retreat within the wagon when conversation began upon the road, for fear that the presence of a collar should have a stiffening effect upon strangers.)

Towards evening it became quite cold; and the air blew keen and sharp as I motored back, after securing a room for the night. I caught up with them on the common mentioned by the friendly woman. In the middle of a large piece of waste ground

twinkled a light: one of the wagon lamps, held by Edward, who moved slowly about like a large fire-fly.

I could hear their voices clearly across the cold air.

"There is rather a queer smell here," remarked my step-sister in a tired voice.

"Perhaps some dead thing," observed Edward cheerfully, and then I heard Jobiska hastily urging another place in preference.

At length the pitch was chosen, and in far less time than one would imagine the horse was loosed and fed, the shafts taken out, and the steps fastened; and then Edward, mounting the roof, hurled down what appeared to be a volley of miscellaneous missiles. As a matter of fact, these consisted of the sack of dogs' food, the canvas bag containing the rolled-up tent, another full of pegs, the wooden ribs of the tent, and the mallet: the fourth being his mattress and blankets. All these were covered by a tarpaulin during the march.

The interior of the wagon was very snug with its well-filled book-shelves, clean white walls, and bright lights. From without came the sound of repeated blows — the tent was evidently going up fast. I hated looking on during the first stage of this ceremony, since — debarred from helping — I had to see Jobiska hold up the whole by means of a stick, while Edward ran round the interior fitting the

"ribs" into the sharp stakes which were then driven into the ground. Jobiska's burden weighed forty pounds but by slipping most of the weight to the back of her head on to her coil of hair, she assured me that it was not as bad as it looked.

Then, while Edward hammered down the double row of tent-pegs and tied the ropes, she turned her attention to other tasks. The dogs were lying in a half-circle with their eyes fixed upon her as she unpacked their supper and then went to water the horse and to fetch a pailful. In about twenty minutes she returned. The horse, actuated by innocent gaiety, feigned nervousness at one of the dogs, and danced round Jobiska like a frisky elephant. She had him on a long rope, and he began careering round her in a circle at its extreme limit. Jobiska—before I could join her—brought him to anchor by the simple process of sitting down (for nothing bores a horse more than a game which he has to play alone). We returned to camp carrying her large pail of water between us; and she then settled down to stir what proclaimed itself to be a dish of onions.

"Why onions?" I asked.

"Men must work and women must weep," she sang flippantly, and with streaming eyes. "As a matter of fact we should never have got on at all to-day if we had wasted time on shopping; and with cold meat I usually fall back on what is in the back of the larder; usually chance 'thank-yous.'"

"What *do* you mean?"

"Well, when farmers let you draw on to a corner of their land for one night, they usually refuse payment. In fact, only once I remember (in Saxmundham) a farmer making a charge. We arrived late in the evening and left early the next morning—but he was a tradesman as well as a farmer, which may be the explanation. He was very prosperous, too. You see, we bring our own forage, and never do any damage or light fires, or give trouble in any way; and if they don't want payment, I always buy—next morning—anything that they have to sell, on purpose to thank them. We get a queer collection of 'thank-yous' in this way; but usually the things come in usefully; although upon one occasion we suffered very severely from some home-cured bacon: Lot's wife would have been less bitter eating! And then, once, there were three bottles of 'Gingerade,' and I own they made me rather shy, as the woman had no paper to wrap them in, and I had to walk down the street with their necks sticking out of my pockets. I said so, upon which she laughed and answered, 'Oh, you needn't mind, they look very nice with their gilt paper; every one will think it is champagne you are carrying!'"

The evening was spent in earnest consultation with the map, for Jobiska had promised to return by a certain date, and unpunctuality might be met

with censure. She carefully planned the most direct homeward route, which alas! included Ipswich, Colchester, and Chelmsford. (I say alas! because towns are to be avoided when caravanning.)

The next few days flew by as usual. On Saturday afternoon I went off to secure a room until Monday in the nearest town, but to my surprise, on Sunday morning, I found the wagon ready to start — in a field overlooked by half a dozen trim villas, from every window of which the inmates peered out with the liveliest curiosity.

Jobiska explained that a pitch was difficult to find in that neighbourhood, and that last night the principal landowner was away playing bowls; and they were told that the bowling-green was lit by electric light, so that he might not return for hours. However, his wife kindly sent for him, and he at once offered them a shelter on Gallows Hill. Of course Jobiska pronounced it haunted: and was told that some idea of the kind seemed to prevail in the neighbourhood. This little field was the only alternative and, too tired to notice their surroundings, they had retired to rest.

Upon awaking to the fact that they were the cynosure of every eye, they decided to leave that morning: but upon attempting a dignified exit, they found that the gate had been locked by mistake: and so they remained prisoners until their host returned from church! As soon as possible they set out. By

Jobiska's orders I remained behind for a day of study; she said that I should not enjoy caravanning on Sunday in a populous neighbourhood, and I believed her.

In the evening I made a successful reconnaissance. They had just pitched their camp in a little rough, open lane: and it was as well: for the weather had changed, and it was pouring with rain. The tent looked like a pale green lamp in the distance: the Horse had just finished his meal, and so I gathered had his zealous attendants, Jobiska and Edward: they were at that moment attempting to interview a small boy of a stammering habit of speech. He spoke something like this:

"Y-y-you had b-b-better g-go away: th-this is pr-pr-privit."

After a process not unlike painless dentistry, they extorted from him that he had nothing to do with the owner: a farmer who was d-d-d-d-

"Dead?" suggested Jobiska: the boy shook his head.

"Drunk?" prompted Edward with a similar want of success.

"Dotty?" I exclaimed (it became like a missing word competition, and we leaned forward in our excitement, pelting the wretched boy with guesses).

At last "domineering" cantered in a winner; and we learnt further that this farmer thought that he knew everything and was rather hot-tempered:

upon the whole a less rare character than the boy seemed to imagine.

He departed, and the dogs curled themselves up under the crutch like three large white muffs. Edward was busy tidying up in the tent, and I was preparing to say good-night and to urge Jobiska to go to bed at once, when Mascarou sprang growling to his feet.

For a long time we could hear nothing: "All the same," said Jobiska, "that must be the enemy. Step in the wagon and stay there please: remember your promise. And from inside you can hear everything without being seen."

The angry flare of an approaching lantern fell upon the large mild eye of the Horse and outlined the camp with fatal clearness. Edward was standing in shadow at the tent door; Jobiska whispered something to him, and he popped silently inside like a startled rabbit, while she hastily shut the flap.

"Pretty comfortable," were the farmer's first indignant words: "pretty comfortable, and on my land too."

"Well, we did our best; and it seems very nice, thank you," answered Jobiska; "but I am so sorry it is private ground: it was rather dark, and we could hardly see anything; and the Horse has had more than enough."

"Not of my grass, seemingly," remarked the farmer, as a loud munching announced that that ani-

mal was sampling the weedy growth at the hedge side.

"We are so sorry," repeated Jobiska.

The farmer looked over her head, trying to find some male being whom he could bully. But Jobiska refused to be ignored: "If you allow us we should very much like to stay until to-morrow morning, please."

"And if I don't?"

"Well, we must move on, or stop at the side of the road: but it may be a very serious matter if we do."

"Why?"

"Because one of the members of our party is laid up — I would tell you what is the matter with him, only it is a long and complicated name, and you may not have a medical dictionary."

"I suppose I know as much as most people," he snapped. "I don't never need no dictionary."

"Well then, you will be sorry to hear that the poor fellow has hypochondria," said Jobiska gently.

There was a long pause; then she began again. "Of course, as you know, it is not catching. The only remedy is complete quiet and freedom from worry. If he could get a good night's sleep in your splendid air¹ it would do wonders for him;" at this moment she coughed, and a long hollow groan echoed from the tent. "You see, he cannot even

¹ The lane was in the lowest part of Essex.

bear the sound of our talking! Now of course, if we have to move on to-night, it will be terribly hard on him — there might be an inquest afterwards, and it would be so inconvenient for you to have your name dragged in.”

The farmer shuffled his feet. “I have always kept clear of public life: coroners, politics, and such like, and always will. Stay here to-night as you *are* here; and so long as you move off early to-morrow, I shan’t say nothing.” He turned on his heel, and as he moved off, a fainter groan reached us, and he almost broke into a run.

When he was out of sight — “All right, Edward, but I only asked you to groan once,” said Jobiska as she retreated into the wagon.

IV

And now I come towards the end of these rambling pages, and to what is, from my point of view, a most amazing episode.

Jobiska and I had been walking up-hill, Edward had bicycled on to do some shopping. Edward’s bicycle was very old and tied together by a string in parts; it also lacked a brake, and he had sometimes to fling himself off in the most perilous manner. To see Edward dismount suddenly was an appalling spectacle; he himself admitted that the machine gave him “anxious moments”; but he considered any

other to be too good for caravanning, and that this one was too old to waste money upon by providing it with a brake.

We reached the top of the hill to see him rushing headlong from our sight, and my step-sister remarked that he was gone for a good two hours, because his invincible politeness made him wait in the shop to begin making his own purchases until every one else was served, and because: as the town we were approaching stood upon a slope, he might have to fly straight through, and on for some distance until he was able to turn: if the streets were at all crowded. As she spoke, she fastened a propitiatory nosebag on the horse, and then said: "If he is eating he will keep awake, otherwise he always dozes between the shafts, and then he falls down in his sleep." She then explained that she wished to visit an old lady whose house adjoined the road, and asked me to take the reins and occupy the driver's seat until she returned, and to promise not to go on and leave her. I readily agreed, upon which she entered the gate and vanished.

It was very hot, and I dozed in solitude. Suddenly I heard a female voice saying: "Them strite-fronted corsets ruin the figure in *my* opinion," and looking up observed two women walking up the road; then silence and a new voice struck upon my ear: this time it was a man who spoke: "and I would think nothing of chucking away a sovereign on a

gamble if I thought it was worth it. I always ask myself first: 'Is it worth it?' and then, 'Can I afford it?' I never go in for anything that I can't afford."

"Then a shave must be rather expensive to-day, as I see you haven't had one," replied his companion, unimpressed, and they passed on. Again silence, and I resumed my doze. Finally, the sound of wheels and of Jobiska's voice smote upon my ear. She seemed to be wheeling some one in a bath chair along the other side of the shrubbery. It was then that a sudden thought flashed through my brain, and made me start to my feet, or try to do so. For — to my horror — I found that I could not move. I was securely gummed to my seat by some hideously sticky mixture: with a groan I recognised fly-paper of the strongest kind, doubled and fastened to the driver's seat. I was trapped, and with her first words I gathered that this was a devilish plan of my sister to make me listen to her conversation. It was as follows:

"Now, Mrs. — do be reasonable," she began. "I know that you are against the marriage, and that Jean is your ward, but do let me ask you what there is against it?"

"Want of money," snapped the invalid guardian of the girl whom I — well who has been alluded to on page 4, and whom I will call here Jean.

"Yes, but then, think of what there is in favour

of it. They are both madly in love, and they are both old enough to know their own minds. Tony is a perfect darling" (I only repeat this because if I repeat it at all, I must repeat the whole, and you who read will have learnt long ago to take Jobiska's statements for what they are worth), "and his only drawback is that he was not the eldest son. But can you blame *him* for that? Then, as you know, he is not erratic like me: I always say that we have nothing in common except a father! And he is not exactly a pauper; and he is *certain* to get into the Staff College." O Jobiska! "And sure of having a brilliant future." I blushed for my step-sister, and squirmed uneasily upon my prison bench. "You made them promise," she resumed, "neither to see nor write to each other for a year. He has no idea where she is, and the year will be up to-morrow. Have you decided what to do?"

"No," replied the old lady frankly.

"Very well," remarked Jobiska, "we can stay here in this nice shady place and talk it out."

Expostulations from the guardian, who had a large appetite and wanted luncheon which was already late (but who was tied to the bath-chair by gout). However, Jobiska only added hunger as a new weapon to her store; and began a long lecture on Love, Marriage, and the policy of Expediency.

"You see," she said, "Jean has something of your iron will: it will grow more and more pro-

nounced as she becomes older. She has set her heart upon marrying Tony, and by the time you have changed her mind — in ten years or so — there will be fewer people wanting to marry her. And think of the ghastly life you will have during that time! She will be constantly making awful scenes and worrying you until you will hardly be able to call your soul your own."

Mrs. ——— seemed moved at the prospect, and murmured feebly: but Jobiska continued inexorably: "Your life upset, your daily habits disarranged, meals all anyhow, and continuous horrible friction with an embittered woman."

Horror piled upon horror, until the old lady became furious and therefore sincere (it took an hour): "Very well," she exclaimed at bay, "let him take her and marry her. But mind, I am not going to fuss about the wedding. Let them go to a Registry Office," anger was confusing her slightly. "I will hear no more of the matter."

"Do you really mean it?" asked Jobiska artfully.

"I never say what I don't mean," answered the guardian, now thoroughly roused: "The sooner they go the better, and if your brother backs out of it, it will be a lesson to Jean, while she lives."

"You are sure that you will not change your mind when you think it over?" O perfidious Jobiska!

"It would be the first time in seventy years if I

did, and in any case, I am too old to begin now. No — I am in earnest — if they insist upon marrying I won't have my life made a misery. Marry they shall and at once — and don't let me hear any more about it — and now lunch is hours late, and no doubt completely spoilt."

As the peevish voice ended the sentence, Edward appeared, and we were both still struggling for my release when Jobiska joined us.

Jobiska glanced furtively at me. "She's a mean old wretch," she observed, "if only you had let me tackle her before! I told the Family that she was ruining Jean's life simply from meanness, and because of the expense of the wedding and wedding presents. Now she will get out of all that. I wonder why Jean's father made her the guardian — vulgar old wretch — except that she is sure to leave all her fortune to Jean one day."

These incoherent remarks were made as we fled from the scene of action — through the town of —; and, before I could speak, Jobiska had sprung down and had dashed into the post office.

"That is all right," she exclaimed. "I have telegraphed to Jean to prepare her. All you have to do is to rush off and get a special licence, and be prepared to motor her up to London somewhere or other and get married.

"I know where Jean is, but I shan't tell you, because you would only bombard her with telegrams,

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and I told her long ago that I was going to try and bring off this 'coup.' Meet me beyond Ingatestone to-morrow at eleven."

I sped away.

V

The next morning I arrived at Ingatestone from London in a wild state of mind, but there was nothing awaiting me at the post office.

So I motored on and soon overtook them. She was walking by the Horse, while Edward, sitting on the crutch (it was downhill) trimmed a candle. I got out and caught up Jobiska. Peering under her large shady hat, I saw with concern that her eyes were red.

"Jobiska — nothing has happened?" I asked selfishly, thinking that Jean had changed her mind.

"Nothing — I have been saying good-bye to you in my mind, that is all. Do you suppose one ever wants to lose a brother?" and before I could answer she had stopped the Horse and opened the wagon door. Once more it held a surprise — for Jean herself stood upon the threshold.

Her face is like a king's command
When all the swords are drawn,

quoted Jobiska softly; and indeed Jean's face is of the vivid, radiant kind that makes you catch your

breath. Somehow we all found ourselves inside, and then Jean and I were alone. Jobiska had tactfully shut the door upon us two.

We stayed there for (it seemed) a second or so because, of course, for me the whole world was within the four walls of the little wagon, and then, suddenly, there was a noise like an earthquake, followed by a sudden silence. Then Jobiska's voice:

"Now, Edward, of course he dozed and fell down, and I asked you to feed him with carrots to keep him awake!" followed by Edward's patient protest: "I *did* give him the whole lot: he went and ate two dozen, and then he must needs snooze off while I was fetching the nosebag. He's not used to standing still in the shafts for an hour or more at a stretch."

We hurried out, apologetic and confused; the Horse had risen with lightning rapidity, according to his habit, and Edward with discreet gravity was brushing the dust off the elephantine and fortunately uninjured frame.

"It is curious how every one's affairs have been settled up at the same time," said dear Jobiska, for want of something to break the silence; "my maid writes that her engagement is on again. The cook told her that she must be reasonable, and not expect him to be Job returned to earth; and so she made it up with him, and they are to be married soon. And now you had better fly together."

We both hugged Jobiska in the middle of the high-

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way, and we got into the motor, leaving her, a solitary figure, surrounded by the dogs, all nuzzling close to her hand. As we started, she pointed in front of us where there was a gate leading from the hedge to a road, and on the gate, by a curious chance, was written:

“TO TRUE LOVES ONLY.”

A YANKEE TANGLE

I

ELISE MADISON sat in her sitting-room at the Ritz Hotel awaiting her brother and his wife, who, lately arrived in London, were to visit her that evening.

She was tall, fair, and distinctly handsome, whilst if I should be asked to name her most remarkable characteristic I should say that it lay in an invariable (outward) harmony with her circumstances and surroundings. I add "outward," because this harmony was assumed: a talent rather than a natural trait. Wherever you should chance to come across Miss Madison you felt instinctively that you could imagine her nowhere else except in just that one particular place, and that she was far more perfectly suited to those surroundings than she would be in any other.

For instance, should you have been privileged to join her at the present moment you would be unable to fancy her anywhere except in her present luxurious circumstances, with one well-shaped foot stretched

towards the fire and her graceful body resting in a large armchair.

The face, regular as to features, if rather cold in outline and colouring, gave a pleasant sense of repose.

Here, you would judge, is a woman who is neither exacting nor complex in her attitude towards existence.

Women are apt to treat life as they treat a shop and its contents. Many waste their time over some trumpery object; not a few snatch at bargains, laying up for themselves much subsequent vexation; others turn the whole place upside down, only to leave dissatisfied and empty-handed; while finally there are those who long so bitterly for what is out of their reach that they miss all that is worth having.

Now Miss Madison belonged to none of these. She started out prepared with her shopping-list, and for all that she sought of life, she was prepared to pay a just price in ready money.

To her the airy fabric of dreams, illusion, and romance were idle superfluities; I can imagine her pushing them aside across life's counter, exclaiming that they "had no wear in them at all." Equally would she walk past the bargain corner with her nose in the air; and whatever she eventually chose, even if dull and uninteresting to the unpractical eye, would be universally applauded as useful, sensible,

and "well worth what she had given for it" (or rather "paid," for the word "give" never fitted Miss Madison).

Everything had prospered with her until now; and so she might well be inclined to plan the future upon the same secure and practical basis as before, without allowing perhaps sufficient margin for the interference of circumstances.

Rather more than a year ago an uncle, Hiram Madison, after promising to divide his fortune equally between his niece and her brother Jim, had left her the whole.

She herself, while freely admitting that the will was rather hard upon Jim could not help inwardly applauding the sound judgment shown by her uncle.

He had often told her that she should have been the boy and Jim the girl. "Your head is as hard as mine, Ellis," he used to say.

Still she could not recall any attempt upon her part to influence his ultimate decision. It appeared only right that she should visit him daily during his last illness, bringing him little presents (obtained upon a simple system of credit from obliging storekeepers who knew the family and their circumstances); and smoothing away those little worries with which the household were prepared to vex him.

It certainly occurred to Hiram Madison to wonder why a nurse was never a success unless chosen

personally by his niece; and to notice how only those arrangements entirely managed by her were carried out without hitch or hindrance. She insinuated herself everywhere; her sagacity and sterling business qualities impressing him far more than her soft tread and ready smile. To the servants she was invariably kind, although, strangely enough, they loathed her without a single exception, and cast suspicions upon her dutiful conduct.

To Jim, fifty miles away, busy upon a picture which was to earn him undying fame, but that now could not provide him with a railway ticket, she thought it unnecessary to write, and when it was all over she felt that she had acted for the best in this, as in all other respects. After she had given orders for the sale of the brown stone house and contents, and for the erection of an expensive tombstone over her uncle's grave, she separately and peremptorily dismissed every one of the servants, and then announced her plans to the Jim Madisons (now summoned, at her expense, to attend the funeral).

He and his wife firmly refused any portion of her fortune almost before she had made them any definite offer. They assured her that they were, as indeed they appeared to be, entirely happy and contented with their lot; and if Jim looked older and more anxious, he explained the change by insisting that it was the work that he loved which was taking it out of him.

Some little time had passed since then, and much had happened in the interval.

First of all (according to the programme which she had roughly planned for herself during her uncle's last illness), the heiress had left immediately for Europe, armed with definite projects and an unimpeachable chaperon.

Her next care was to find one of those women, more good-natured than rich, who would introduce her into what is known as English society.

She also changed her name Ellis to Elise, and adopted a slight foreign accent. Incidentally she discharged another item of her programme and broke off her time-worn engagement with Keith W. Dawse, the junior partner in her uncle's firm. She had determined upon settling in England and upon marrying an Englishman. Her views regarding marriage were as usual both brisk and practical: with her fortune she was prepared to buy an old name and an assured position in the country of her adoption.

The bargain was a fair one, and she felt quite content to place this matter of matrimony, as well as everything else in her life, upon a business footing. She had, of course, considered the affair in detail; she knew that her fortune was not sufficiently large to be remarkable nowadays; ambition must not soar too high; but then her ambition, like everything else belonging to Elise, was kept under perfect

control. It would be ridiculous in these extravagant days, to contemplate any marriage entailing a brilliant social career upon her present income, and the life of a lesser star she dismissed with contempt.

Upon the other hand, if she could find some (noble) owner of an estate upon which he was too poor to live! She could imagine herself in the pleasant setting of a beautiful old house, with a high and respected position — dispensing hospitality, organising and supervising everything in her part of the country, varied by descents upon London.

She gauged to a fraction the value of her own personality and force of character; and the good looks, of which she held so high an opinion, were set in their own place as an asset of lesser importance.

To those who are aware of the present state of agricultural depression and excessive taxation in this country, her quest would appear a very simple affair, and Elise judged the end of her programme to be well within sight, when she concluded the purchase of Graylands about a week before you made her acquaintance at the Ritz. Meanwhile Fortune, as though tired of smiling only upon the sister, cast an encouraging glance towards Jim, who had had the good luck to meet with a rich Englishman and his wife, travelling in the States, and of whom he spoke as "my patrons": a cheerful old couple, endowed with sound artistic perceptions, and who had

fallen in love with Mary. Having bought several of his studies, and warming to their new career of art patronage, they had offered to lend their London house for an exhibition of his work, and to guarantee expenses. Her brother's good news cast a shadow upon Miss Madison's bright sky, for an unknown painter relative in America is all very well, but his actual Bohemian presence (since to Elise everything not strictly utilitarian, was trivial or Bohemian), did not appear as an unmixed blessing.

Fortunately it was now autumn: in the height of the season it would have been far more trying; so she welcomed the Jim Madisons with appropriate warmth when they arrived upon the evening in question, and prepared her line of defences during the family talk which she apprehended.

Mary Madison confessed to a slight feeling of awe in the presence of her imposing sister-in-law, towards whose calm countenance her own delicious eyes turned half shyly; while her little hands twisted nervously in her lap when Jim began the attack after dinner by asking whether Elise had definitely settled in England. "My dear Jim," answered his sister patiently, "I told you my plans from the first; that I meant to leave America and the old life as soon as I could arrange to do so. I bought Graylands last week — as you know — after a great deal of bother and trouble, and I mean to live the rest of

my life over here and to marry — if ever I do marry — an Englishman.”

Mary shivered slightly, for Elise pronounced her last decision with the same cold finality that she always employed towards any matter of business.

“By the by,” he went on, “your letter was a great blow for poor Keith.”

“I suppose that he objected to American money leaving the States,” answered Miss Madison with rather a disagreeable laugh.

“And you, Jim, were the first to object to the engagement because Keith has such a satanic temper.”

“Yes, but as you waved aside my objection five years ago, when you got engaged, it is rather late in the day to think of that now. It was a knock out for him; he feels very sore and bitter about you. And be careful what brand of Englishman you marry; I am not speaking from the dollar notion which you attribute to Keith; but I do feel very strongly about some of these mixed marriages. People talk about physical degenerates in the States, and say that the get-rich-quick man has children that are all nerves and no morals; but just think of the other sort, children born of women who buy their husbands, and fathers who sell themselves and their long names and idle good-for-nothing lives.

“Do you suppose that it is the best kind of Englishman who chooses a wife upon the business system you contemplate?”

"It is not particularly pleasant for me to think that no man, in your opinion, could want to marry me except from motives of 'cold calculation,'" remarked Elise, but without resentment. "Besides there are heaps of happy Anglo-American marriages."

"I know that; one has only to think of the — and the — and the — and dozens of others. I am not, of course, speaking of those when I abuse the rest," said Jim. "You know very well that you are not thinking of anything but marriage from a — we will call it — *practical* point of view."

"Let us concede that," answered Elise. "You may even agree with Uncle Hiram that no Englishman marries an American who can afford not to. I have my own views and my own plans. I read somewhere or other that every one marries *for* something! You married Mary *for* love, just as I mean to marry *for* position. You must not despise me because my motive differs from yours. Both are selfish; both are equally futile in each other's eyes. You may not agree with a person; you need not heap wrath and scorn upon them merely because you cannot see from their point of view. And now, after this lecture, when is the exhibition going to open?"

She spoke with perfect good humour; they felt that they were powerless to disturb her unruffled

calm, or even to argue with her set purpose, as they had always felt where she was concerned.

Elise was not angry with her brother; her sense of justice recognised the soundness of his remarks and, as she was entirely lacking in sensitiveness, the truth did not appear in the least repellent. She would have been the first to admit that with Englishmen in general she did not seem to be very popular so far, and that in spite of her marvellous powers of adaptability she seemed to attract them no more than they attracted her. Perhaps it was because she could not understand them and just as her cool practical sense seemed to repel them, so their apparent lack of these qualities irritated her.

But then, neither here nor in America had she ever admired or respected any man except Hiram Madison. All brain and talent was measured, in her eyes, by solid results: her uncle had had his ambitions and had fulfilled them all; in her opinion no one could have succeeded more completely.

It was all very well to talk to her of Napoleon and of Byron and so on; but she had to live in a matter-of-fact world, and, so far, she had come across no one who had really "made good" like her uncle. Such a one, however, she did not expect to find when she should marry.

All she asked was a fair bargain; and (if only Jim could be brought to understand it!) — with

such a bargain she would be perfectly content; social position, and a famous or honoured name in exchange for herself and her fortune. She looked complacently at her reflection in the glass opposite, and again Mary shrank back; for it seemed as though her sister-in-law's expression was not prompted by vanity, but resembled rather the appraising eye of a merchant pricing his wares; and the notion was singularly unpleasant.

Meanwhile their conversation turned upon Jim's good luck. Elise made it plain that she did not wish to meet Mr. and Mrs. Buscoe (the "Patrons"). As a matter of fact, this was just as well; for the kind old people nourished a very strong prejudice against the sister who had managed to snatch the whole of Hiram Madison's fortune. She learnt that Jim's exhibition was to open early in the following week, and that in the meanwhile he was entirely occupied in superintending the unpacking and hanging of his work.

Before they left they asked for a further description of Graylands. Elise explained that it was an old house which had been in the same family for centuries. She did not add that the present head of the family was a bachelor and penniless, that he lived at the Manor Farm, and that it was against him that her matrimonial campaign was directed. I use the word "against," because no one who knew Harry Kaine could readily imagine him choosing

Miss Madison of his own free will — as a bride. But already she had learnt the commercial value of patience as opposed to the flimsy illusions of hope when applied to the affairs of life, and she felt neither daunted nor disheartened.

Gifted with a natural insight that is quite separate from sympathy, she gauged with the nicest accuracy the struggle within his soul; how he had saved and pinched to keep Graylands; fighting inch by inch, year by year, until at last his duty as a landowner and landlord defeated him, and he had to yield.

Elise saw clearly what it had cost him to lay down his pride and accept defeat and her offer for the place: an offer so large that it would have been criminal folly to refuse.

She resolved that the house should remain exactly as the family left it, guessing that such a conduct on her part would touch the most vulnerable point in his armour. Love of their home had been a strong point in the Kaine character for many generations, and, next to his pride, the heart of the late owner had been torn more cruelly than any one, except the shrewd purchaser of Graylands, had guessed.

The old house should be her lure; for the rest she might safely trust to luck, ably seconded by sound judgment. I do not think that she was very much elated by her new purchase; pride of possession is not the same sentiment as love of power, which was

her ruling passion; perhaps the only passion that her life was ever to hold.

The Jim Madisons wondered at the facility with which she had dropped all her old life; as though her real existence had only dated from her first arrival in London. Never speaking of her old friends or of America, they soon perceived that this was not from any form of affectation: Elise had simply forgotten, and never once thought of the past.

When Mary told her that Mrs. Dawse wrote full of anxiety about her son, Elise merely expressed the polite sympathy of an acquaintance. She was so entirely absorbed in herself and in the present, that everything else had faded from her mind.

At last, upon a wild day in October, she asked Mary to accompany her upon an expedition to Graylands; putting up at the village inn three miles from the house, which was empty except for an old caretaker.

Mary readily agreed. Elise had been singularly agreeable and expansive during the last few days: a not uncommon symptom when people succeed in getting their own way. She really liked Mary; perhaps because she was such a complete contrast to herself.

How any one of Mary's undoubted intelligence could show such indifference to money and the world in general — in fact, towards everything that really mattered — was incomprehensible to Elise: just as

her sister-in-law's quick, unforced sympathies and many interests surprised her. It seemed such a waste of time and strength to care and to feel so much.

They started off upon a bright autumn morning, and at the last station but one a tall young man in shooting clothes jumped into their carriage, followed by a retriever; he apologised for the dog, saying that he had thought the compartment was empty; but Elise begged him to remain, and introduced him to her sister-in-law. It was Harry Kaine.

Elise saw that she had gained a step upon her way; for he had brought himself to talk about Graylands without effort, and they discussed the place and several local matters of mutual interest. She also realised that he was just as pleased at her determination to leave the place untouched as she had meant him to be.

When the journey ended she insisted upon dropping him and his dog at the end of the lane which led to his farm.

"I like Lord Kaine," said Mary, "he looks like a thoroughbred horse. Did he mind selling Graylands?"

"Well, he was frightfully poor," answered Elise evasively: "when his father died they found that there was no money left. He had to leave the army, and there was plenty for him to do at home: you see, he owns farms and a great deal of land. His mother

and sister live with him, I believe, and people make just as much fuss about him and his family as if he were a millionaire and lived in a palace!"

Graylands was a long low building well situated on the slope of a hill, from which stretched the neglected gardens down to a wide mere fringed with trees. The building was so covered with ivy that very little of the original stonework could be seen. An ilex half covered the entrance, leaning against it like a tired dark head against some strong shoulder. The house looked very lonely and deserted, without sign of life except for the rooks calling to each other across the water. However they were expected; and after a rusty bell ("the only one in the place that rings," laughed Elise) had pealed through the whole house, an old woman appeared to admit them.

Mary uttered a cry of admiration; for she had never seen anything like the hall before.

It was a large room reaching the entire height of the house; the walls were panelled, an ancient fireplace held a huge log fire, and opposite this a most perfect specimen of wide oaken staircase led to the floors above.

"There are no sitting-rooms down here, only the dining-room: they are all on the next floor, where we shall find the pictures — and tea!" Elise said, as she led the way upstairs and into the first room that opened on to the wide landing.

This was a little boudoir with walls of faded silk,

and from the latticed windows you could see over miles of blue hills and dark woods to where a line of silver marked the sea. This boudoir led into a large drawing-room, furnished with stiff sofas, and a few scattered chairs — some of them Chippendale. Let in panelled walls were family pictures: many generations of Kaines (most of them soldiers), and of the women whom they had married.

Passing through they reached the ballroom, looking curiously empty and deserted, with a beautiful old polished floor; and from here they gained a passage running cross-wise and distinguished by three doors. The farther one of these led up a steep back staircase to the old nurseries, and the next opened straight out on to the terraces and garden, while the third was the entrance to the "Pope's Hole," or priest's hiding-place of old days.

The two women opened this door and found themselves in a small room with a thin, patched carpet; and drawing this away Elise revealed a trap-door so large that it took up most of the floor. Mary stood back on the threshold, and Elise seized a rusty old ring and pulled at it with all her strength. The hinges, weak with age, gave, and the whole thing came off like the lid of a box. Propping it with difficulty against the wall they peered down into the hiding-place: a tiny, windowless chamber, so far below that it was like looking down into a cellar.

"In the anti-Catholic days they would lower him

there with a rope when they heard the enemy coming," remarked Elise. "I must have that mended by the village carpenter. Come on to tea, Mary," and shutting the door they returned to the boudoir, where tea was laid by candle-light.

Then she noticed that her companion's eyes looked strained, and her face white and drawn.

"Why, what is the matter with you?" she asked. "You look as though you had seen a ghost?"

"Do you know that is exactly what I *do* feel," Mary answered. "If I lived here I should always be seeing ghosts. How could you buy the place, Elise? I should feel like a thief!" And her voice lowered almost to a whisper.

"My dear girl," exclaimed Elise with a laugh, "I am a thief who has paid a very large sum for the pleasure of owning Graylands."

"Oh, that is not what I mean," and Mary rose as she spoke, her tall figure dark against the faded wall. "To me the house is so terribly sad. I can never express what I feel. I find it always so hard to speak; but you know how I love houses, and this house is so full of character that I feel as if it was alive and breathing; as if it had been loved by ever so many people through centuries of time; and as though we were surrounded now by ghosts of those who lived here, and who are grieving because it is sold. It must have broken their hearts — the living Kaines, I mean! The bare walls are yours, but you

can never own the soul of the house that is so dear to all those sad people living and dead, whose home it was. I know that I would rather have starved than let it go."

"So would they, perhaps," Elise found herself saying, in spite of herself; "but *he*, Lord Kaine I mean, owed a duty to his people — it *had* to go."

"But surely you must feel like treading on a grave when you walk upon this old threadbare carpet. And then the tapestry — that is full of whispers — the voices of the dead who wove them, and of the living who patched and darned and made over so desperately just to keep on living here. I can almost see the people whose pictures looked down on us in the next room. Why, the house must just be full of memories and ghosts! I feel them round me; I almost want to touch their cold hands, so that I could hold them in my own warm ones and comfort them. If I were you I should be so frightened — I should feel everything so against me here as a newcomer. Surely that strikes you with houses? I know at once if they seem friendly and welcoming; here everything is hostile and yet so sad."

"My dear, what nonsense!" said Elise calmly. "It is rather weird by candle-light (there is not even a lamp in the house); and I assure you that I did not force Lord Kaine to sell me either Graylands or its contents, but the pictures are let into the wall, and he preferred to sell me everything as it stood.

You must not let your southern blood run away with you and get fanciful, or you will see spooks!"

"Don't you realise that you offered him such a large bribe that he dared not refuse," broke in Mary. "It was not for himself, there were people dependent on him. You told me that there are his mother and sister and all those poor tenants, whose farms are tumbling to pieces. You tempted him, you see! How I wish that you had not come here! They will hurt you because you are hurting them. Oh, how sorry I am!"

The tears stood in her eyes, and Elise saw with surprise that her distress was very great. Fortunately the old caretaker appeared at this moment to announce the return of the motor to fetch them, and, a few minutes afterwards, they were speeding down the famous lime avenue towards the lodge.

This again stood empty, while everywhere the weeds grew on the paths and desolation reigned. Elise thought of the time, so near at hand, when she should revive the beauty of the flower-gardens, when the empty buildings should be filled, and when life and cheerfulness would chase away the loneliness and the silence.

It pleased her that she should be able to change such a place at her will; already she was so busy with her schemes that she did not heed Mary who, apparently recovered from her outbreak, sat white and still by her side.

At the inn they were treated with an extreme deference. Of course greatly exaggerated reports upon the American girl's wealth had reached the village, every one of whose inhabitants was occupied with building castles in the air. If Elise had guessed at all the philanthropy that was expected of her she would have been very much amused; although charity (upon strictly practical lines) found a place, of course, in her comprehensive programme.

The next morning was beautiful: sunshine and frost combining to produce a perfect autumn day. Mary seemed to be tired out, and Elise urged her to stay in bed and to try and sleep again.

Such a prescription is easier to give than to follow, especially as, in this case, the patient was evidently in a very nervous state, and kept continually urging Elise not to return to Graylands.

At last, when she had timidly implored her sister-in-law to get rid of the place for no obvious reason except that she thought it should be restored to the rightful owners, Elise swung herself out of the room. She softened later on, returning with a promise to stroll about the village that afternoon instead of going over to the house. As they were returning to London next day, Mary was pacified, and gratefully fell asleep; upon which Elise left the inn.

Halfway through the village she met the motor returning from an errand, and, jumping in, she went for a drive, wishing to improve her knowledge of the

neighbourhood. It was a lovely part of the country, although difficult to appreciate at the speed with which they were travelling.

She loved to be driven fast — motoring always soothed her brain and cleared her thoughts; but to-day she was careful about ordering the chauffeur to show every possible caution: a local magnate must not court unpopularity at the beginning of her career.

It was growing late when she turned back, but she resolved to stop at Graylands; they must in any case pass the gate, and Mary need never know. Indeed, by now she would be feeling better; and they would laugh together at all these foolish notions when she got back.

Wishing to make a closer inspection of the stables, which were at a little distance from the house, she was driven straight there, and, after discussing with her chauffeur the proposed site and plan of the new garage, she walked up to the house, telling him to expect her in the course of an hour or so.

As the old caretaker answered the bell she thought of something that Mary had said that day: "The whole place is in mourning," and, in the autumn dusk, it was easy to indulge in such a fancy as this. Bright fires were lit in the principal rooms, but still an air of melancholy seemed to penetrate everywhere.

However, Miss Madison never wasted time over sentimental thoughts, and there was plenty to do; she climbed the oak staircase up to the bedroom floor,

and made a rough list of all the linen, blankets, and other necessities that were needed. Having accomplished this, she went down again to the boudoir, and sat looking over her list and adding to it as memory prompted. She was just finishing, when suddenly she started and dropped her pencil, having heard distinctly the sound of footsteps echoing through the house. At first she thought that it must be the old woman, but it was distinctly a man's tread: heavier and firmer than that of the caretaker.

The only other living soul about the place at that moment was the chauffeur, whom she had left to await her at the stables. Even as the thought flashed through her mind she realised that it was a stranger. The footsteps were mounting the staircase now; she could hear the creaking of the polished wood, and although she could not tell why, there was something sinister in their monotonous regularity. They were not those of a casual stranger either; they belonged to a person who was seeking with deadly earnestness something — or someone — certain to be found in that house.

Could it be the ghost of a dead Kaine, come to put the new-comer to flight? She remembered Mary's entreaties to her to abandon Graylands; how she had kept on repeating "*They* will hurt you somehow, and soon. You have taken the home from the living and the peace from the dead. *They* will fight you, and you cannot hope to win."

Then she shook herself impatiently at the nervousness which was so unusual to her, and which caught at her throat.

It was only the horrible, uncanny silence of the house that made any chance incident seem so remarkable — she would soon change that!

Meanwhile the footsteps still climbed nearer and approached the head of the landing. Would they stop here or go farther: up to the floors above?

Involuntarily she looked at the ancient bell hanging broken on its faded silken cord. In any case, long before the caretaker could have come half-way from her distant kitchen, the stranger would have come in.

Even as she grasped this the steps came across the landing and paused at the door: then this opened and Keith Dawse entered the room.

A flash of red from the sinking sun caught his eyes, and their expression terrified her. Then he broke the silence:

"So here you are at last, Ellis," he remarked, and his voice grated against the stillness. "Won't you say that you are pleased to see me? I am mighty glad to run up against you at last."

"Why do you come here?" she asked sharply, although her voice trembled in spite of herself.

"Because you were here, and because — do you remember saying that you would always despise men who stayed in debt? You used to say that it did

not matter to you whether it was from their own fault or someone else's — but anyhow they were contemptible in your eyes. Well, I have only one bad debt in the world, and I am going to wipe it off right now. I have come all the way across to kill you, Ellis."

Outside a rat squealed suddenly in the wainscot; within the room the woman sat, quite still, half choked with fear.

"You will be hanged," she gasped at length.

"I should not bet about that," and he smiled.

"But you loved me once?"

(Any appeal, however mean, might serve to gain time.)

"That is why," he answered. "But you could not possibly understand! Love and so on means nothing to you, and damning a man's life — less than nothing. So I won't put off time trying to explain. You see, I have come all this way on purpose."

He spoke deliberately, and something told her that she had no chance against him; she might scream for ever without being heard unless — and here a hope of escape came to her: if she could manage to get through the drawing-room and the old ballroom, and so reach the outer door in the passage beyond? Once there she would be out on the terrace, and safe, for the stables were upon that side of the house.

She saw that he stood with his back against the door by which he had entered: evidently he had not

noticed the one in the opposite corner, communicating with the other rooms.

Before he had realised that she was going to move she sprang towards it, and in a moment had slammed it behind her.

Then she found herself in the midst of a darkened room, for the curtains were drawn and the fire was almost dead. Fresh from the light in the next room she could distinguish nothing, and just managed to grope her way behind one of the large sofas, when he, too, opened the door, which swung sharply and shut as he came in. She could hear him curse and then stumble slowly along the wall towards her corner.

Her breathing seemed fearfully loud — surely he *must* hear it — and she put her hand over her mouth. Suddenly, for some unknown reason, the thought came to her of the pictures of all the dead Kaines looking down upon this grim game of hide-and-seek; then her brain began to work wildly: how was he going to kill her?

Evidently he had planned everything, showing the same methodic attention to detail which she admired so much in herself. Of course he was not going to shoot (it would make too much noise), but then? The question seemed to answer itself, as she remembered the nervous, muscular hands even now feeling their way towards her; and she shook all over.

At that instant — her straining eyes suddenly be-

coming accustomed to the darkness — she caught sight of the door-handle to the left of the portrait of Myles Kaine who had been killed in the Spanish wars, and whose mouth curved in what seemed a sudden mockery.

But she had slipped round to the door at last, and now she was flying down the long ballroom as fast as her feet could carry her over the slippery floor, fleetest than any who had ever trod those boards before.

Keith was close upon her — he was no more than a couple of yards away when she reached the passage, and now she had only to remember which of the three doors led into the garden!

The question tore through her brain, but there was no time to think, or perhaps her terror had chased away everything from her mind. At all events, it was a stricken thing that snatched at the *nearest handle*, with eyes so distraught that, even then, she saw neither the open trap-door that watched for her beyond, nor the little priest's room that waited below; so quiet and still — a fit sanctuary for all that remained a moment later of the once clear, clever brain and fair body of the new-comer who had placed the house in mourning.

?

WE were sitting round the fire talking idly: the subject of our conversation being "Coincidence," and Billy Drake was bringing his inevitable anecdote to a welcome close. You know the old saying, that if you see a piebald you must first wish, and then keep silence until you meet a grey? Well, it seems that Billy was going along Regent Street in a hansom, and, having passed a piebald successfully (which is to say that he had not seen its tail!) he wished with fervour. Then he began to look out for the grey. In these degenerate days of automobilism such a task becomes increasingly difficult and, as though to complicate the situation, his only direction to the cabman had been: "Drive straight on until I stop you, as I cannot remember the exact address."

Thus they jingled on in tense silence until they reached the open country. And it was then that Billy, overcome with anxiety, abandoned his usual attitude of graceful ease, and started forward in order to scan the distant horizon with a scrutiny now become almost hysterical in its despair.

This change of position caused him to observe that

the horse between the shafts of his hansom, although temporarily black from sweat and fatigue, was an excellent specimen of what is known as a flea-bitten grey.

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We were all plunged in depression at the end of this tale (which had taken some time in the telling), and indeed were longing that a piebald would pass at that moment across Billy's range of vision; for he was now beginning to try our patience further by explaining at considerable length that his "wish" having been to win the fiver with which he had idiotically backed an animal at even money running upon the same afternoon at Sandown, this excursion — in spite of the fact that the wish was duly granted — had left him a loser on the day.

Suddenly a young woman who had seemed plunged in an excusable absent-mindedness during the last hour roused herself to tell the following story, without taking the preliminary precaution of discovering whether we were willing to listen:

"You may not like my tale any better than the one which you have just heard," she observed, to Billy's evident surprise and discomfiture, "but of course you cannot tell until you have heard the story. I was once staying in Paris to buy clothes. Having written to the hotel beforehand in order to secure a quiet room, I found that one had been reserved for me, facing the courtyard. This was covered over

completely to the height of about fifteen feet ; so that, from my window, I looked down on to a glass roof, and across at the lace-curtained windows opposite ; for the hotel was built completely round the courtyard.

“ My maid and I (her room opened out of mine) are in the habit of sleeping with wide open windows, so that we were glad to learn that the rooms opposite were empty. I say rooms, but the manager told us that it was one ‘superb’ room, the size of our two rolled into one.

“ My stay was to last just under a fortnight, and for a week all went well. Each day my maid and I scoured the shops whose prices we could afford, and flattened our noses against the windows of the rest.

“ In the evening I retired early and slept well, feeling in that contented and satisfactory state of mind common to a woman when she is engaged in draining her dress allowance to the dregs. It was early in March ; I was not free to choose the time for my visit, and the hotel was almost empty ; but — upon the morning of the day in question — I crossed two new arrivals as I went out. One of these was tall, and his appearance suggested a good specimen of the confidential servant. He was leading a little old man, who leant heavily upon his arm and whose face I could not see. They were turning into the bureau as I passed, and I should not have noticed them at all if it had not been that I was struck by

an odd expression upon the honest face of the servant. It was an expression of fixed fear, and, as he looked down upon the short figure that he supported so carefully, it seemed to me that it was not the sudden and fugitive appearance of a passing mood or emotion, but as though it must be one habitual to him when with his master.

"The dressmaker, however, immediately afterwards occupied my attention to the exclusion of all other thoughts, and the incident passed completely from my mind. That evening I found to my surprise that I could not go to sleep with my usual promptitude. I went to bed early, tired out, but nevertheless I remained awake for hours, haunted by a vague apprehension.

"The large windows opened inwards in the French fashion, and thrust aside the curtains so that a shaft of light showed between. This had never hitherto interfered in the least with my slumbers, but now my brain as well as my eyes seemed involuntarily concentrated upon the open window. It occupied all my thoughts and yet, for the life of me, I was unable to determine the nature of these thoughts, except, of course, that they were coloured by fear; but fear of what? Of masked burglars crossing from the room opposite armed with chloroform, and with the definite design of stealing the six francs fifty centimes that lay upon the chimney-piece?

"But the courtyard was wide, and the glass roof

too far beneath to lend much encouragement to such a project.

"No, I could not define my fear, except that it was entirely connected with the windows opposite.

"I felt very cross, and turned over resolutely towards the wall; but no, something drew me round against my will; it seemed that I must face that cursed window. (The adjective may seem strong, but after a hard day's shopping, and with several more in front of me, I am sure that I will have the sympathy of every other woman in the room!)

"Well, I suppose that I must have dropped into an uneasy doze; and then I woke up with a jump, bathed in a cold perspiration of terror, torn suddenly from a nightmare all the more horrible because it was without form and impossible to describe.

"All I can say is that it makes me shiver even now — in recollection. And yet there is nothing to remember, only the conviction of something indescribable, indefinite, lurking near the open window — and that had stared in upon me. Something unspeakably evil, sinister and malignant.

"I was forcing myself all this time to look at the window, and I could see nothing except the broad band of light, faintly yellow, from the lamps outside. *Of course*, something had gone wrong with the electricity near my bed, and I had to creep across my room and turn it on from the door with a shaky hand.

Too frightened to feel ashamed of my feelings, I resolved to awake my maid, and opening her door I called softly. To my surprise, for she is a sound sleeper, I was answered at once in a voice so frightened that it seemed an echo of my own. She was evidently broad awake, huddled beneath the bed-clothes.

“ ‘How glad I am to see you!’ she declared when she saw who it was, and she went on to say that she had just had a horrible dream of which she only retained the vivid impression that some apparition had come peering between the parted curtains; except for this all she knew was that she had been frightened to death, and upon waking had wrapped the sheet over her head!

“ This accounted for her alarm at my knock, as she had at once imagined that the apparition had come into the room.

“ ‘All the same,’ she said inconsequently enough; ‘it had something to do with the window opposite.’

“ We looked out together, and, to our surprise, through the muslin that shrouded the glass — we saw lights burning.

“ We decided for once to exclude fresh air. I felt that perhaps with curtains drawn and shutters barred our nerves might rest in peace. My little maid is a Catholic. As she was leaving the room I asked her if she was afraid of having another nightmare.

“ ‘Oh no,’ she answered simply, ‘I shall make the sign of the Cross before I go to sleep’; and she suited the action to the words.

“ Immediately afterwards I fell into a sound and peaceful slumber, and, as I learnt afterwards, she did the same.

“ Early upon the following day I asked to see the manager.

“ ‘I thought you told me that the room opposite was empty?’ I began. He bowed.

“ ‘So it was until yesterday. Mademoiselle remembers the little old gentleman who entered upon the arm of his valet? Well, he insisted upon taking that room as it is so quiet — although it is too large to be warmed properly at this time of year.’

“ He seemed almost apologetic. I bent forward, half ashamed of my request and stammered: ‘Do you know I think I should like to change our rooms. I sleep badly, and now that I know the room opposite is occupied I have the disagreeable feeling that we are overlooked by some one, perhaps by that little old gentleman.’

“ ‘Mademoiselle,’ he said quietly, ‘the little old gentleman died in the night.’ ”

THREE BLIND MICE

HOW amusing it would be if we could learn the true circumstances in which our friends and acquaintances first fell in love.

Unfortunately we seldom hear this, for perhaps complete sincerity might prove too entertaining; but supposing that we could, I am sure that the first thing to strike us would be the extreme facility with which they succumbed to the wiles of the little blind god.

Now if it had not been for an unexpected delay upon the railway line David Steel and Susi Strangers — but let us get to our story.

It was upon the dawn of a summer's day, and David was the sole occupant of a compartment in the Sud Express.

As he happened to be one of those unfortunates who find themselves unable to sleep in the train he had preferred an ordinary carriage to the jolting misery of a berth, and sat watching the sun rise, and reflecting prosaically enough, upon the possibilities of coffee in the near future. These possibilities, however, abruptly vanished, for, with the strange wail which distinguishes the Continental from the

British steam-engine, the express came to a sudden standstill while the sunrise was shut out from his sight; because another night train, coming from the other direction and upon the next line of rails, had been stopped at the same time.

This interested David less than the fact that a girl's lovely face looked out from the carriage immediately opposite his own.

At first he thought that it must belong to a boy, for even in the darkness of what was evidently a sleeping berth, he saw that the slender throat ended in what was clearly the collar of a pyjama jacket. However, upon his eyes becoming accustomed to the sombre background, he noticed that the dark curly hair — although short for a girl, was considerably longer than that usually worn by a boy.

A prig might have thought it more proper to look away; but the ordinary human being will agree with me that such a proceeding would have required a quite unnatural determination. The face that confronted David, closely framed in the narrow window of the sleeping berth, was small — made to appear still smaller by wide grey eyes in shape long like almonds and dark-lashed, intensifying the fairness of a very white skin. The forehead was low and broad, and, when they parted in a smile, the curving lips revealed little teeth of brilliant whiteness.

Upon the whole it was a picture well worth the sunrise, and David suddenly realised that he had

been staring at the stranger for very much longer than politeness sanctions. He therefore looked away, first at the dull photographic views provided by the railway company for his entertainment, then to the right at an equally dull, blank wall, finally up to the ceiling, and then found himself unable to refrain from just another glance towards his pretty neighbour.

Obviously she had followed the same programme, for their eyes met and, without thinking, they both smiled. Still the trains remained obstinately motionless, and at last she spoke in a low and entirely charming voice: "What a ridiculous situation!" she said, and laughed softly. He thought that he had never seen such an attractive face before, but, unable to give expression to such an opinion, he suddenly found himself talking desperately and against time, as though by such a proceeding he could keep the trains standing still, and because he was hoping that he might learn something more about her before they parted.

Within ten minutes — incredible as it may seem — (impossible even to anyone who, knowing the usually shy and silent David personally, should chance to read these pages), he had fallen violently in love.

Imagine — after a long night journey, and at an hour when romance must naturally pale before the need of breakfast and sleep!

Cynics will pretend that the cause may be found in the fact that, at such a moment, the intelligence must be at its lowest ebb; but then every one knows that the highest intellect may be swamped by any emotion, providing it should come with sufficient strength and unexpectedness.

In any case, I can only record an undoubted fact — a fact so undoubted that it caused David to ask her to tell him her name, giving his own with a stumbling abruptness that, arising from the disturbance in his feelings, might easily have been mistaken for rudeness by a critical audience. To his surprise her face lit up with interest.

“Mr. David Steel in the ——— Brigade — the golfer?” she asked.

“You are interested in golf?”

“No,” was the frank reply; “but I saw that you won the amateur championship. I have often tried to make my brother learn; he shuts himself up too much at home. Now that I know your name,” she added teasingly, “why should I tell you mine?”

“It is all very well,” cried David violently — shy men are often violent when aroused; “the train may start at any moment, and you will be carried away. How can I find you again? And there is nothing I have ever wanted so much as that!”

“You are very reckless,” she answered. “You can only see my face; how do you know that I have not a hump, or that I have only one leg? In any

case, how far more amusing not to know; for instance, to imagine me to be a prima donna? Imagination is always so much more delightful than plain fact. We have met once; suddenly, mysteriously, and, wherever else you may come upon me, it will be an anti-climax."

"I will chance that," he said.

"Then it is at your own risk," she replied with seriousness; "for myself I hate the commonplace, but I am perfectly commonplace all the same. My name is Susi Strangways, and I live in London with my brother, who is fast asleep next door."

"Where?" almost shouted David; for the train had begun to move.

"Cheyne Row," was the reply; and then out of his sight and out of his life — inexorably she was borne away; and the world seemed to turn suddenly cold.

This then is the story of their first meeting, plainly told, without the glow and colour of the summer dawn that wrapped the scene in a tenderness and romance which is not so easily written down, and which, after all, can never be really reproduced either by the medium of words or in real life.

I need not take you with David upon his grilling journey, which was to end at Naples upon a visit to his mother, who, having taken a villa in the neighbourhood for the spring, had prolonged her stay there, insisting that the heat was proving of benefit to her health.

I can imagine no setting more becoming to the fostering of dreams than that afforded by her garden, and, as David leant against the balustrade of a terrace that looked over the serried green of quivering tree-tops to the bay far away below, and watched the town change in the summer mists by day from lilac to pink, by night to a crown of flame over the darkening waters, he had time in which to think over that strange meeting from every point of view: beginning with the first stirrings of his heart in those wonderful few minutes, and ending in extreme thankfulness to the impulse that had prompted him to wash and shave at an even earlier hour!

He wrote to Cheyne Row, a timid, commonplace letter, between the nervous lines of which any woman, however inexperienced, could read; and he hurried there upon his return.

Of course, he was very imprudent; he ought first to have found out about her family and their position in life (I quote his mother as she spoke afterwards), and all about the girl herself — as if any man could ever find out all about any girl then or at any other time! But these questions did not cross his mind.

Perhaps the childishness, the charming simplicity of the face had moved him as strangely as its beauty; in any case, often as he had speculated about falling in love, he was forced to admit that here was the real thing with a vengeance. His duties were mechanically accomplished; he made a pitiable exhibi-

tion of himself at golf, and — to make a long story short — Susi was fortunately in when he arrived at her home.

He was shown into an old-fashioned room, and as he was very tall he had to stoop to pass under the low doorway. Within, the hangings were of powder blue, and you felt instinctively that the quaint little satin-wood spinet in the corner, and the pieces of old Chelsea on the mantelpiece had never been moved from their places for a hundred years.

Then Susi came in. Of course he had only seen her face in the train; it seemed quite strange to meet her in ordinary dress, and walking across the room like any one else. Somehow in his thoughts he had never imagined her away from her wooden window frame. Certainly, however, there was no anti-climax such as she had predicted.

In height, rather below than above the middle height, she was very slight, and there was something rather un-English about her manner of speaking; perhaps the words seemed more completely pronounced in her clear and charming voice. Her hair, no longer flying loose, was dressed low and wide above the little ears. As David looked into those deep, shadowed eyes his heart leapt, and he felt a longing greater than any he had ever known, to see them wake from dreams to passionate life, and yet — even as he longed — he felt a humble wonder as to how he dared hope so far.

Aloud he said little. He had thought so much and now, in her presence, the words refused to come.

He silently cursed himself, little knowing that so complete and obvious an absorption in her is hardly likely to leave the coldest of women insensible.

"My brother," remarked Susi, "will be back soon. My mother was Italian, and it is extraordinary (considering that neither of us can remember her distinctly) how much he resembles her in character and tastes, at least so our Italian friends tell us. I love everything that is English; but all Luigi's sentiments are Italian. He even keeps a little villa near Siena because it is the remains of property once belonging to that side of our family: a dismal little house where we go every year for a few weeks, and which he considers far more his real home than this. I am sorry to say that Luigi has no profession, but he works much harder than some men who sit all day in an office. Here he comes!" and she introduced them to each other.

Luigi Strangways was very slightly built, like his sister, to whom he bore a marked resemblance. At the same time, and in spite of a timid, even silent manner, there was some latent force about him that compelled and arrested the attention. You guessed at an intelligence in advance of his years; and that was seconded by an invincible industry; the quickness of the Italian allied to a plodding capacity for work inherited from the British side of his family.

David felt curiously at ease with both brother and sister, although they were unlike any people that he had ever met before in London. They had, like their house, a marked individuality, and they were so absolutely natural. Obviously quite unworldly, there was an extraordinary distinction about them. They seemed somehow apart from their surroundings, as though, through shyness or indifference, once within their delightful old house they let life go by unheeded outside.

He felt privileged at being allowed to enter their little world, and yet he wanted more than ever to snatch Susi away from him, if only she would consent to come!

It was enchanting to be actually in the same room with her — so enchanting that the uneasy feeling crossed his mind that, once outside, he would have to shake himself all over in order to make sure it was really true. Tea was brought, providing David with an excuse for prolonging his visit by a few minutes, and when the servant announced that a Mr. Arkwright had arrived downstairs, Luigi left them alone.

"That is my brother's great friend," Susi explained; "he is much older than Luigi, but they both love science and microbes and germs! They work together in what used to be an old lumber-room at the back of the house. Luigi likes him very much. I find him rather alarming, and his wife very tiresome. She will come and fetch him soon. He was here all

the morning, and has only returned now to bring some papers."

David scarcely listened; he was wondering if he dared say something of what was in his heart, and his usually cheerful spirit became a prey to fears not less depressing because they were foolish, and not less disquieting because such sensations were entirely foreign to his nature.

If he left her to-day with everything unsaid he could not return for three weeks at least, as he was just going out on manœuvres.

What might not occur in the interval? Some disaster would be sure to happen — supposing she were to become engaged to some one else? She was so lovely that there must be other men in love with her.

He had risen to go when these disturbing thoughts rushed pell-mell through his brain; and then he caught her hand.

"Susi," he said hoarsely, and he had never felt so nervous in his life. "I have no right to speak to you like this; you know nothing about me, and probably care less! But I must tell you, before I go, that I care for you as I never knew that any man could care for any one. I have thought of nothing since that day in the train except of you, and of how to see you, and to say what I am trying to say now.

"Probably you will never speak to me again," he ended, lamely.

Susi smiled, but her eyes were wet.

"I think you very foolish but very nice," she murmured in her low voice. "What do you know of me? A girl you saw from a carriage window! How do you know that I might not talk so to any stranger!"

David smiled too, as he looked at the proud little head flung back. "What I think — I am too frightened of you to say!" he replied. "I can only repeat that I love you more than any one or any thing on earth; and if I could only think that you might care for me some day I should be impossibly happy. Or if you married me and just tolerated me even ——"

"What a terrible risk you are willing to run," she answered. "I wonder if all men are so brave? But you shall not have all the courage. I must try to show some as well, and so I say that what you feel I think I feel also — only ——" and she held up one little hand for silence. "I must be quite sure. You see this is the only thing in a woman's life that matters. So I must not make a mistake. I will wait a little, and then I will tell you, unless you should have changed your mind by then."

He laughed at such a possibility, and tried to draw her towards him, but again she spoke.

"Luigi has a fantastic idea that I should marry one of my Italian cousins. It is all very foolish — simply because we happen to be the last of the ——"

— and here she named a family that has long lived in Italian history — “and in the old days my mother’s family used to intermarry with another branch at Siena. I cannot say that I have any sentiment about all these people, but Luigi is mad about family history. At the same time if he realised that I was resolved he would give in, after a time. He is now in the midst of writing some tiresome scientific book, so I can tell him nothing about my affairs. When his work is finished, and I have made up my mind, then ——”

“And your mind?” asked David eagerly.

“Is nearly made up,” she said in a whisper.

David left as though he walked upon the clouds. In fact, so little did he notice his surroundings that he immediately ran into a tall, well-dressed woman who was just approaching the house.

“David Steel!” she exclaimed, and he came back to earth with a sudden shock.

The woman who addressed him was of a florid type of physique. Also she not only felt and looked prosperous, but this prosperity was almost aggressive, forcing itself upon you, compelling your attention and acknowledgment. David had made the acquaintance of Maude Downe at the house of her father, who followed the dreary profession of army crammer.

I need hardly add that boys do not often go through such a preparatory process nowadays, but David’s

career at Eton had ended abruptly in rheumatic fever, and he was compelled upon his recovery to take up his residence at the Gate House, Bosworth, and make up for lost time.

He found himself in the company of two other youths who have nothing whatever to do with this tale, and of a third, the only and very stupid son of millionaire parents named Brand. Mr. Downe, a widower, had done his best to give his daughter an excellent education, but, although she spoke three foreign languages perfectly, and was what is known as well-read, she proved to be one of those individuals whose character is what might be called ready-made.

She early showed a practical spirit that would have surprised a middle-aged mother of marriageable daughters, and her fixed idea was to escape as soon as possible to the future of her ambitions: a future of wealth allied (for her instincts were wholly respectable) to an unimpeachable husband.

That her father was lonely and ageing, after a long life of hard work, mattered not at all. She buried any scruple of this kind with the aid of excuses afforded by stock phrases, instancing the necessity for every one fighting their own battle in life, and flowering the grave with convenient reflections upon the material benefits which her father might derive from a marriage such as she contemplated. Her practical spirit recognised her limitations. She knew that she was neither clever nor

captivating, that youth, and a certain freshness accompanying youth that is country-bred, were evanescent. She had therefore no time to lose. It is unnecessary to remark that her father was ignorant of these plans; the character of Maude had always baffled his understanding, and it suited her better that he should not be compelled to recognise a vulgarity which he was only permitted to suspect.

She turned her attention towards the students, who, if only what might be described as raw material, at all events represented what was nearest at hand.

For some time she could make no progress with her projects as, while refraining from open incivility, they laughed at her heartily in private, nicknaming her the Syren (partly in satire, but also because her fluted voice possessed the carrying properties of a fog-horn).

Then David appeared upon the scene, and, of course, was soon made acquainted with the general opinion of Miss Downe. She did not attract him in the least; but it struck him that she was being hardly used, and that she really did not deserve such treatment. A nickname resembles sticking-plaster in that both are adhesive and undecorative. Of course he was not to know that she remained in ignorance of the whole situation, and that she was far too complacent to entertain any doubt about her popularity.

She soon perceived, however, that she had un-

consciously made some appeal to David's sense of chivalry.

Somewhere she had read that to fool a clever man a woman, if not clever, must necessarily be beautiful.

This sounded depressing, until it struck her that a woman need not be very intelligent in order to work upon a man's chivalry, and that, out of such a source, an unscrupulous woman should be able to make no inconsiderable capital. Meanwhile David had taken up her cause with the others, and, although she did not improve upon further acquaintance, these all gradually modified their former attitude.

Now David was (and is still) extremely good-looking. He was tall and fair, with a face whose regular features are counter-balanced by humorous eyes, giving him a curious air of youthfulness.

There was, moreover, a delightful frankness and sympathy about him that attracted you at once.

It took Maude some time to discover that his friendliness towards her came only from this ready sympathy which she had aroused by pathetic and entirely fictitious pictures of her existence, and that it showed no signs of changing its character. But when she did realise this, and when she could no longer blind herself to the fact that those meetings which her ingenuity had contrived should always wear a chance character, were destined to yield no further development, the little real youthfulness that her nature still harboured gave place to bitterness.

David, entirely unconscious of all this undercurrent, and only relieved to find that his society was no longer welcome, forgot all about her with unflattering promptitude; in fact, he developed the childish ailment of measles just before he was due to return to Bosworth for the last time, and instead, was obliged to submit to a period of sick-room and nursing.

His mother, who could never tolerate illness in others, summoned Ethel Steel, an elderly spinster cousin living near Bosworth, and indeed through whom she had heard of Mr. Downe in the first place. This elderly lady, who occupied the position of good Samaritan in the family, was always sent for in times of distress. She also possessed the valuable power of soothing nerves, and her arrival was always welcome to David, since it meant that all the maternal atmosphere of fuss vanished under her calm and firm management.

She brought a surprising piece of news to his bedside. Maude Downe had, it appeared, justified the unfavourable opinion that she, his cousin, had always held about her, for, "the designing female having made up her mind to marry young Brand ——"

"Nonsense," interrupted the invalid, "how can a fellow marry at that age? Why it would ruin all one's fun. Fancy having to bother about a woman all day long!"

"My dear boy," answered Ethel, "I will not pause to argue about your flattering ideas of mar-

riage. Of course she would not want to marry him before he has joined the army — she would see to that later on. She longs to get away from home, and to secure a husband with plenty of money. Reggie Brand would just suit; he is very stupid and very rich. It seems that she has been stalking him with some success.

“You, I know, will think me malicious, and I should hate you if you were already able to see through that kind of woman at your age. The strange fact remains that by persistently running after him, she has actually made him rather fond of her. As you know, our village is a hot-bed of gossip, but she is very sly, and a cunning woman knows how to make the most of her opportunities. Mr. Downe, whom she alternately bullies and neglects, is not to blame: you cannot change that kind of nature. The long and the short of it is that there has been some kind of crisis, and that Reggie’s family has intervened. The only course for her to pursue is to go away for a time until the whole affair has been forgotten.”

What this affair was she did not further explain, and naturally every care was taken that the story should not become more generally known.

But eventually David learnt that it was the outcome of a deliberate plot upon the part of Maude to get some hold over the unfortunate youth, to compromise herself in some way with him, thinking thus to

ensure the fulfilment of hopes which she was unwilling to trust to a vague future.

In any case she had failed again. The neighbourhood saw her no more, for she left Bosworth forthwith, ostensibly to visit some friends in London. Now she reappeared, apparently in the most flourishing circumstances, and willing to ignore the past, of which, however, she must surely guess that David had heard.

As she looked at him now in the twilight, she saw that he was just as attractive as ever; also that his expression still retained the old tolerant and humorous outlook upon life.

If David lives to be a hundred he will still have kept a great many illusions, and will still make excuses for those whom the rest of the world condemns.

All this perhaps explains why she chose to walk back a little way with him along the river, instead of immediately entering the house which he had just left.

For his part David was sharply disappointed. He wished to be alone, to think of this great, this stupendous happiness and good luck that had come into his existence. He could not believe that it was true, and yet even the most humble-minded of men — amongst whom he might well be counted — would hardly be justified in feeling much doubt as to Susi's ultimate decision. Had she not told him herself, and yet he felt that he should try and school

his mind to face the other possibility! Still his present happiness would not be denied, and, flooding the landmarks of prudence, rushed impetuously across his soul.

Perhaps this rendered him more patient towards Maude's evident desire for conversation.

"I am indeed surprised to see you again," she repeated, "especially coming out of that particular house, for the Strangways see no one. I never met a young man so old-fashioned and retiring as the brother, and Susi gives way to him entirely. People would be delighted to make their acquaintance, for they are extremely well connected, and can afford to entertain. They have only lived in England since their father's death two years ago; before that time they were always travelling—for his health I believe—and the house in Cheyne Row was shut up. No one is asked there except ourselves: my husband and myself," she added, scrutinising his face to see whether his expression would change at this intelligence. Failing to detect a sign of anything except polite interest, she continued: "I married just about two years ago. I met my husband, John Arkwright, here in London, and it was a case, upon his part, of love at first sight. You must come and see me. We have a large house in Gloucester Place; the largest in fact. My husband scarcely lets me out of his sight; men are such tyrants when they are in love! And, of course, his time is

entirely his own. He has no ties, no profession of any kind." She spoke in a tone of pride and triumph, which appealed to David's sense of humour.

He was trying to fix his attention upon what she was saying, while his eyes rested upon the river, now of that indescribable colour between blue and black, broken only by the red lights of a barge, and framed by the confused outline of the buildings that crowded against the dusk.

"Well, I must be turning back!" she exclaimed, and David, making no attempt to detain her, she turned, repeating a cordial invitation that he should come to see her, and adding, "I am always at home until about this time. It is only in the mornings that I am really busy. I am sitting for my portrait (to a Royal Academician). My husband says that I am a perfect Rubens."

They went their ways, David with a chuckle of amusement at her last remark; while he wondered why time should only deepen her vulgarity; Maude full of mixed thoughts.

Even her innate conceit — for since her marriage complacency had climbed into conceit — could not entirely blunt her excellent practical sense, and she had been unable to refrain from observing that nothing either in his words or manner had manifested the faintest wish to renew what she was pleased to call their old friendship. And she felt a sudden wish that it should revive: perhaps his complete

contrast to herself was what attracted her most, although she was unconscious of this difference; observing only that from a delightful boy he had developed into a fine specimen of Englishman.

She had never favoured analysis, belonging rather to those whose critical powers are never turned inwards, and, just as her former energetic walk had now inclined to a strut, so it was with her mind.

She was aware, however, of something in the nature of a shock. David was wrong: Time had done more than accentuate her more salient characteristics. During the years that had elapsed since those days at Bosworth, she had evolved a fanciful version of that one-sided attraction. In retrospect she had even come to look upon herself in the light of a penniless but attractive maiden, secretly loved by a youth too honourable to ask her to share his poverty-stricken future (time obliterating the fact that David was by no means poverty-stricken, although less favoured by fortune than Brand).

Now, all in a moment, this agreeable fancy was swept away like dead ashes blown upon by a passing wind only, just as that same wind sometimes calls to life a sudden fierce little flame upon an apparently lifeless hearth, so her habitual self-confidence blazed up in a moment: it was only that he had forgotten: and if a man forgets, a woman can always help him to remember. Such was her comforting reflection, and, even if she did not really love David, still she

owed it to her self-respect (an odd conclusion) not to allow old friendships to slip from his memory so soon.

Of course the lovers exchanged innumerable letters during manœuvres, although neither had any news to impart in the accepted sense of the word. David, upon the march, in camp, engaged in various complicated manœuvres, a humble unit in that dusty, sweating, but cheerful force called the "Blues"; while Susi, living her shrouded life in the little Chelsea house, followed its daily progress so simultaneously (and quite differently) reported in the papers, until the glorious day when that force wiped the floor with the "Reds," entirely owing, she felt convinced, to David's consummate ability.

Now that he was away she realised how large a place he had come to hold in her solitary life. Luigi, busy upon his book concerning the relationship of science and medicine, was so inaccessible, that she resolved to keep him in ignorance of her affairs until the New Year, when he proposed to take a definite holiday. "The Professor," as he called Arkwright, came regularly to the house: he was a man between forty and fifty years of age, with a shock of grey hair and deep-set black eyes; and although to Susi he was uniformly agreeable, as we have said before, he inspired her with a vague fear.

There was an air of repression and gloom about him; and beneath his urbanity she guessed at the

presence of some mystery hidden, kept in the background, as it were, upon a chain.

When David returned she insisted that he should pay a visit to Mrs. Arkwright, since Luigi holding her in considerable esteem she might help later to influence him in their favour. David had indeed convinced himself of the surprising fact that Maude Arkwright was a welcome guest in Cheyne Row.

That Susi merely accepted her as the wife of her brother's great friend, he was of course aware; but he could only account for Luigi's favourable opinion by remembering how few Englishwomen he knew, and by concluding that in his inexperience he judged her to be a typical example of English womanhood.

He was conscious of a sincere disappointment when, upon being admitted into the drawing-room of the largest house in Gloucester Place, he found Mrs. Arkwright alone. Never having paid an afternoon visit, with the exception of that first notable occasion in Cheyne Row, he had counted upon the presence of someone else to help him out with the labour of making polite conversation.

His hostess, however, spared him any difficulty upon this subject by beginning at once to recall what she was pleased to describe as "old days," rather to the surprise of David, who might reasonably be supposed to recall their rather sinister conclusion.

However, she seemed to have forgotten this; he

wished that she had also forgotten her old habit of calling every one by their Christian names.

"Oh, David," she began, "you do not realise how hard a girl's life can be! My father did not understand me; and I never knew what it was to be cared for by any one. At an age when everything should be gay and happy I heard nothing but complaints about poverty."

She rose and walked to the window, as though overcome by an emotion too strong to control.

"Men can escape into the world," she resumed, in a low, strained voice. "Women must stay behind and endure: they can never get away."

"But you *did* manage to escape at last," observed David, thus gracefully describing the enforced flight to London; "and you have been happy ever after, as the story-books say."

"Yes, the story-books! I wonder how much they ever know about real life. Do you suppose that a house and fine clothes and furniture must necessarily mean happiness?"

David remained silent: perfectly aware that money meant everything to her, and yet guessing that she felt herself at this moment to be perfectly sincere.

"No," Maude continued bitterly. "I have given up my hopes of true happiness. Once I might have been 'happy ever after,' but not with John Arkwright. Were you always so blind — can you not

guess?" She came close to him and stared up into his eyes.

Poor David, nervously losing his presence of mind, exclaimed "Reggie Brand!"

Her face flushed.

"What? that stupid fool!" she cried. "No, surely you must have known?"

David had never felt so wretched before, for her expression left no doubt of whom she spoke. What he would have answered he never could afterwards imagine if, by the greatest of good fortune, a servant had not entered at that moment with a message.

Somehow he made his escape, and fled to his club as swiftly as he could be conveyed by the nearest taxi. He dared not face Susi for fear that she should notice that something was amiss; and he could hardly tell her of the scene from which he had just been delivered! Of course, he did not seriously believe Maude, and the only conclusion to which he came was that he would never again pay a visit of politeness.

At the club he found a telegram which had been forwarded from Aldershot; it said that his mother had been taken ill, and that he must come immediately.

David's mother was one of those estimable elderly ladies who look upon the army as a convenient institution founded for the purpose of keeping their off-

spring out of mischief: a welcome resource when school can no longer take their sons off their hands.

She therefore rejoiced that David should have been so eager to embrace a military career; but she had no notion that it was a career involving hard work.

Any reference to this fact was viewed by her as a kind of professional excuse, such as she made of her own health: invaluable where tiresome invitations had to be evaded.

Respecting her own claims, however, she admitted of no excuse from any member of her family, and long experience had convinced her son as to the futility of any attempt at explanation.

When he arrived at her bedside (she had been most conveniently taken ill at the house of Ethel Steel) David found that, while really ill, the invalid was, as usual, thoroughly enjoying the situation, of which she took advantage to insist upon his remaining. He realised, and so did she, that this meant the end of all further leave for the year, since he had already taken nearly all of that allotted to an adjutant already in the winter for hunting.

There was nothing for it but to acquiesce. In the intervals of sitting with her he wandered about a neighbourhood which he had not revisited since the Gate House days. Ethel Steel told him that Mr. Downe had gone to live abroad, and David asked her if she had heard about his daughter's marriage.

"Oh yes," was the reply, "indeed, I expect I know more about it than you do. Gossip has a strange attraction for this remote place. It seems that she really did go to stay with a relation in London, and that the relation either tiring of her society, or willing to perform a good-natured action, introduced Arkwright, who was looking about for a wife. Apparently he had made up his mind to marry with the object of 'founding a family,' as the French say. He has a great deal of money, far more than any one would suppose from his retired life and simple habits, and determined to choose a wife uniquely from the point of view of a future mother. Maude, strong as a horse, entirely free from what he called the neurotic tendency of the present day, seemed clearly indicated. As to her character, he had not heard the story, and he would not have believed it if he had. Any one who knew Maude must always realise that whatever little scene she may have planned once upon a time — as a means to an end — she would always be absolutely virtuous for the simple reason that she would never want to be anything else.

"Passion assumes various forms; with her it is finance! Arkwright is not the first man to confuse sexlessness with virtue; and then, in the quality of husband, ultimately to discover the difference. Well, he took a considerable time to make up his mind; but when at last he proposed, he was immediately

accepted. They were married; and in spite of all his caution he was disappointed, for I hear upon the best authority that she will never have any children."

"My dear Ethel, how can you possibly know?" remonstrated David.

"Because she came down ostensibly to pay a visit to her father just before he left, and really to display her good fortune. As you know, I cannot bear the woman, but she caught me unawares (I had a new butler), and imparted this interesting information," answered Ethel.

"What an odd thing to do!"

"Well you know what the drawing-room is like at tea-time?"

David smiled; the children's hour at his cousin's house was one not easily forgotten, for the room literally surged with the offspring of relations, who seemed singularly generous about lending her their blessings for so long as she liked to borrow them.

It appeared that Maude Arkwright had come in just as these were trooping upstairs to bed, and perhaps this brought into her mind the recollection of her own childless future, for which she quoted excellent medical authority, adding that personally she regarded the news more in the nature of a surprise than a disappointment.

David noticed with amusement that his cousin, in spite of her old aversion for Maude spared little

sympathy to Arkwright; evidently, as a woman, viewing with unconscious cheerfulness the discomfiture of a male.

Meanwhile, in spite of the old superstition regarding the burning ear, Maude Arkwright was serenely unconscious of adverse criticism to which — in any case — she would have remained supremely indifferent. In fact, she felt quite content with her present circumstances, at all events until the episode of David's visit to Gloucester Place. Now, just as people who have no liking for strong drink, feel an occasional craving for sweets, so Maude, devoid of any passionate instinct, had inclined towards the sugar of sentimentality.

This little weakness accounted for the scene upon that occasion; although, indeed, she herself was as surprised upon thinking it over afterwards, as David had felt at the actual moment.

In consequence, she now plunged for the first time in self-analysis. She found herself quite glad of the chance to explore a corner of her mind that she had left undisturbed for so long; to "clear away the cobwebs," as she herself would have expressed it. The process proved enlightening.

She realised that love had never entered into her feeling for David either now or in the past: perhaps because she was incapable of any such emotion. He was merely the peg upon which she had become accustomed to hang the dreams and fancies which must

come to every one, however practical. In fact, if those years since she left the Gate House had been less uneventful, they would have put remembrance long ago to flight; but the interval had been so monotonous, devoted to the plans which she had cherished for so long, varied only by efforts to wring more money from her father.

Thus, in default of any other, David had become a landmark, in time much softened by the sentimental mist which gathers, unconsciously and unbidden, around such landmarks, and which was now finally dispersed. For she now applied tests to herself: supposing, for instance, that David were really in love with her now, and immediately conceding that, however flattering, such an element must remain outside her scheme of life, and prove entirely superfluous. Again, to quote from her own vocabulary, she could not "have worked him in," unlike someone else, for instance (but this is a thread which I must drop here to pick up again later on in this chapter). Her brain was not quick, and she had therefore early made up her mind that having one end in view she must always refrain from complicating this by minor interests or conflicting ideas that would only serve to confuse her intelligence. All the same, now that she had reached this point in her meditations, she was struck by the fact that, however little she might really care about him (now she had time to cast a mental search-light over her

feelings), yet the fact remained that she had appeared to throw herself at his head, and that, equally clearly, he had run away with the most extreme and unflattering haste.

Much has been written concerning a woman's state of mind under such conditions, but I doubt if any adequate description be possible.

Once this unpleasant truth had flashed across Maude's mind all the content induced by her present prosperity vanished, and over that mind — so sensible and well-balanced as a rule — rushed a perfect tumult of rage.

She was quite surprised at the strength of an emotion of which she would certainly have judged herself to be incapable.

She realised that it was quite possible to hate David without ever having loved him, and that the anger sweeping her now from head to foot would dominate her absolutely while it lasted. Indeed, she made no effort that this should be otherwise, or to return to her usual brisk commonplace; instead she felt her faculties quickened by this new sensation, and realised that fury acted as a mental tonic: one that would help her to efficient action while remaining hidden from the world at large.

You are not to infer that Maude was taking her first lesson in self-analysis sitting upon the drawing-room floor of the largest house in Gloucester Place. On the contrary, she was walking rapidly

towards Cheyne Row to fetch her husband, actuated, as she would have told you, by motives of affectionate solicitude; in reality, because walking exercise had been prescribed by her corsetière, and the motor was indispensable to the morning sittings: since even a Rubens must not arrive untidy and exhausted to pose for her portrait.

How far Susi had gone in the process of making up her mind may be judged from the fact that she now gravely attended lectures upon domestic economy and household management, at which each member of the audience was generously allotted the hypothetical possession of one husband and four children.

She was coming out of the lecture hall upon this same afternoon when she met Maude, who, except for looking slightly flushed, showed no sign of her state of mind. The two women walked on together in the mellow autumn light, which always seems to suit London better than any other season of the year. Susi, although she did not care for Maude, was glad of companionship. Maude, upon the other hand, always suffered from conflicting sentiments when with Susi — she had the annoying sensation of being in the company of someone infinitely more attractive than herself, in whose presence she always felt inferior, for some reason that her vanity was totally unable to explain. This is naturally a galling sensation; and she had sufficient intelligence to per-

ceive that the girl possessed that strange attribute called charm — which she herself lacked. Still, at the same time, she was attracted by this charm, hence the mixture of feelings. She liked to be with Susi; she sought her society, and yet a vague resentment remained always when they were together.

That two people should get on quite well without an idea in common is, of course, far less rare amongst women than amongst men; simply because men must discuss where women are content simply to talk.

Suddenly a newspaper boy ran down the street, evidently a judge of human nature, for he was preparing to dodge past them (evening papers being admittedly a masculine luxury) when they caught sight of his poster —

“Accident to British officer (— Brigade).”

Of course, it was not David, but when this had been discovered each read a secret in the other's face just as surely as each remained convinced that she had not given herself away.

Neither exchanged a word upon the subject of their real thoughts; they merely discussed the contents of the paper with an animation and interest that would have convinced any one that the *Star* was an absolute necessity to their daily existence, and both walked a little faster — that was all!

The next morning Maude left home on foot, and, once round the corner, hailed a taxi-cab, which she

stopped outside a certain print-shop in Garrick Street. Here she paid the chauffeur, and waited until he had disappeared again round the corner; then, much to the disappointment of the proprietor who, within, was watching for custom like a spider in the corner of his web, she stepped briskly out in the direction of a quiet restaurant entirely unknown to her circle of acquaintance. Crossing the first room whose empty tables were entirely deserted at this hour save where in the corner a pretty cashier sat apparently working out imaginary sums, Maude passed into an inner room, exactly resembling the first, with the difference that here there was a man evidently awaiting her—it was Luigi. Sisters know very little about their brothers' lives—perhaps their intimacy is so precious because it hangs upon so slight a thread. In any case, Susi would have been surprised indeed if she could have seen her mediæval brother—as she called him—under the present circumstances.

He looked transfigured; the dreaminess that was so habitual to him had vanished; instead, he looked like a radiant boy. His sensitive face, almost pathetic in its youthfulness, turned upon Maude with an expression of eager devotion. At the same time he asked with some anxiety:

“Is there anything wrong?”

“No, nothing,” she replied quickly. “I wanted to tell you something that you ought to know.”

A waiter brought them coffee, and until he left them, she remained silent; then she spoke with the decision of one who has prepared the scene carefully beforehand.

"John is quite safe. I left him writing in his sitting-room; and when we meet for lunch, I shall say that I have been out shopping. I wanted to tell you that I believe Susi to be in love with that Mr. Steel. I know that you want her to marry an Italian; but I am afraid that she is far too English to entertain such an idea. At all events, I only guessed the truth yesterday."

"Does he care for her?" asked Luigi.

"He cannot come to the house except to see her," she answered, and he did not notice the evasion. "You see, he hardly knows you. Besides, you are always shut up with your work."

"But surely he would have said something to me," exclaimed Luigi helplessly; "they cannot be secretly engaged!"

Maude smiled.

"I believe that you really belong to the Middle Ages, and that you are only just waking up like Rip Van Winkle! Nowadays in England the young man asks the girl to marry him; he does not first obtain permission from her parents or guardian or elder brother. I do not think that they are actually engaged. I have thought the matter over carefully, and believe Susi to be too proud ever to consent to

a secret engagement. Probably they are keeping quiet because you are busy, then, when your book is ready, she will come and tell you that she loves him —" There was a pause, and then Luigi said slowly:

"And I must give up my old plans upon the subject?"

"I have told you over and over again that you must never make plans for any one else's marriage. It is quite arduous enough to engineer one's own. Indeed, you might marry an Italian yourself for that matter. There is surely an attractive girl amongst your cousins?" Then noticing the reproach in those eloquent eyes fixed upon her, she continued rapidly: "Really, you have no idea of what goes on around you! Of course, Susi is to be trusted, but I suppose you imagine that she never leaves the house unattended? You quite ignore the fact that the rheumatic old nurse, whom she insists upon calling her maid, is quite unable to walk up and downstairs now, far less to walk out with her. But now, let us return to Mr. Steel. Listen," and she leant forward, "you must never consent to the marriage."

"Why not?" asked Luigi blankly. "She met him last time we went abroad — by chance, I believe — but I know all about him. Do you know of any reason against it?"

She flushed under his gaze, and hesitated very successfully before answering.

"It is a little difficult for me to speak about," she said at length; "but she is *your* sister, and so I will tell you. Years ago he came to stay with my father, who lived in the country. I was very young, knowing nothing whatever of the world, and he — tried to take advantage of that ignorance. One night I woke up suddenly, having heard the door of my room gently open. There was a bright moon shining, and by its light I saw David Steel coming towards me.

"I was terrified: it seemed that I could hear my heart beating louder than the clock upon my mantelpiece. He looked so strange that I jumped up. Then he whispered, 'If you scream it will wake the whole house — and you — what will people imagine?' He caught hold of me, and, as he did so, the door creaked (he had evidently not quite shut it for fear of making a noise). Seeing him turn his head at the sound, I leapt to my feet, quick as lightning. I hardly remember how I reached my father's room: I only recollect his amazed face as he turned on the light, and then I fell in a faint.

"Upon the following day I insisted upon going away, but nothing would induce me to tell any one the real cause of my flight. My father thought that I had heard burglars, and called me a bundle of nerves. It seemed to me that I could never sleep in my little room again: that it was haunted! As for the home which I adored, I could live there no

longer; it was as though the servants, the village people could see the traces of fear upon my face. I wanted to be in crowded streets, living in houses which touched each other — anything rather than to be alone for a moment. I suppose that my nerves were all unstrung. Meanwhile David Steel naturally kept silence, and so the incident was buried.

“Then, would you believe it? This summer I met him again, and he had the insolence to try and talk of ‘old days’! I should have cut him then and there, only he was just coming from your house, and, thinking that he had become a friend of yours, I felt disposed to try and forget the past. But when he forced his way into my house, just before he went off into the country the other day, and when — well, I will not describe that visit to you in detail — I will only say that he found himself downstairs very soon, looking extremely confused. Also he has never attempted to come and see me again. As you will see, he was trying to make up to Susi at the same time, but I do not think that he thought of her seriously until he found that I would have nothing to do with him. Now you must tread very carefully with Susi. To begin with, no woman likes to be told that she is merely a ‘ricochet.’ Susi would not enjoy hearing that Steel wished to marry her because I snubbed him. Of course, I would not rake up the past were it not that I consider it part of the man’s whole character, and Susi has seen so few men; there-

fore I feel that it would be all the more cruel if this creature were to wreck her whole life."

"He shall never marry her!" exclaimed Luigi in a voice that shook with anger, his eyes glowing in a face that was dead white. "I cannot thank you enough — you know what I feel towards you already. If possible, this makes another link to bind me to your service. It must have been very painful to you — to speak of all this. I cannot say what I feel; but — thank you for saving Susi."

"And now," said Maude, "you must promise me on your word of honour to follow my advice." He nodded. "Naturally I need hardly ask you — however much she entreats you — never to let Susi know what your real objection is to Mr. Steel. I know that you would be torn in pieces first! This silence — for my sake — will make your task more difficult. You cannot turn the tide of Susi's feelings merely by telling her that you have heard something about David Steel that it is impossible for you to repeat to a girl. For one thing, Susi is too resolute, and for another, girls are told everything in these days. My advice is that you tell her nothing."

Luigi leaned forward intently; his Italian brain inclined to a waiting game of any kind, and, just as he mastered the smallest detail in his scientific studies with a patience far beyond his years, so the smallest plot or intrigue appealed to his intelligence. Also, like every recluse, he was something of an epicure

in sensations. Perhaps, although he was unaware of the fact, herein lay for him the fascination of his relationship with Maude Arkwright. To lift a woman on to a sublime pinnacle, and to offer her a devotion belonging to the age of chivalry, might not have appealed to many men for long, but ever since he first saw her she had stood for his ideal of womanhood.

This attitude was fostered by the atmosphere of secrecy which the situation, however innocent, demanded.

Although he would have resented the suggestion, yet in effect he thoroughly enjoyed the necessity for treating Maude in public as a mere acquaintance, while in private — such privacy as they ever achieved — he was allowed to profess his feelings, and — to kiss her hand upon parting!

Maude, devoid of romance, and quite at a loss to understand what she considered an antiquated form of sentiment, was flattered by such a sincere devotion, which, so long as it should continue platonic in character, she found increasingly useful “to work into” her scheme of life.

That she should inspire such a devotion did not surprise her in the least; indeed, she felt that his opinion of her was only a just estimate. “A lily of purity” and “a white saint”—well, of course, Italians are rather extreme in their language (they often spoke Italian together, as Luigi found it a more

supple medium for the expression of his sentiments), but certainly she had been brought up in the belief that all good women were immeasurably superior to the best of men.

Purity! The word, for her, held only one meaning, and so she felt that purity enveloped her like a cloak. Sometimes when the boy's enthusiasm carried him too far she would laugh, but of course in secret.

She had no idea that — ridiculously young for his age in some ways, and always shut up amongst his books — Luigi was inclined to put a halo upon the first woman whom he should chance to meet. At present the mystic chivalrous character of the sentiment she inspired was sufficient for his undeveloped and still rather effeminate nature, and Maude found him an indispensable ally, particularly in connection with one side of her life upon which the conversation now turned; for, looking at her watch, she said quickly:

"I must speak to you about John; you are the only person whom I can trust. It has struck me lately that he is not so well, and yet you told me that Sir Hill Dyke was quite satisfied? By the bye, I suppose John never guessed that you went to see Sir Hill about him?"

"Oh no!" replied Luigi. "And I really think that you are over anxious. I asked the doctor every kind of question. As I told you afterwards, he re-

peated that the Professor must avoid the recurrence of those black fits of depression, and that, to ensure this, he must have interests, while leading a quiet life. Personally, I have never seen him more cheerful than he is at present; and our book, dull as it would seem to you, occupies his mind completely. Sir Hill said that 'brain trouble' (what stupid expressions these doctors have!) resulting from an accident such as his, is not the same thing as what you and I mean by madness, and that, if you had not been told the story, you would never have suspected that the Professor was not the most normal of men. Of course, a sudden shock might be bad for him; but then sudden shocks are bad for every one! After all, it happened so many years ago."

"But then," persisted Maude, "when we were told — I mean the disappointment about my never having a child — he quite frightened me."

"Yes, I know," answered Luigi. "He was, of course, very miserable. But that is hardly sufficient reason for fearing that he was becoming insane. Of course, it was only honourable of him to tell you the story before he married you; but perhaps if he had kept silence it would have been better for your peace."

"There is something unusual about him," she persisted, "a determination that seems almost implacable, if you know what I mean?"

"It is very useful when we are working out a problem," answered Luigi laughing.

"Of course he does not exercise his determination upon me," observed Maude lightly. "He always likes to know what I am doing, but that is mere jealousy, I suppose," and she smiled contentedly at her reflection in the looking-glass opposite. "Well, he cannot lead a quieter life than he does at present; and in the New Year, after the book is finished, as you have kindly asked us to Siena, I am sure that he will be happier there with all your microbes and bottles — in spite of the cold — than in Paradise! Apropos of this, once you and Susi are abroad, she will be away from Mr. Steel. I happen to know that he has had nearly all his leave already, for he said so when I first saw him in the summer. He is adjutant, which means that he is kept busy. So it seems unlikely that he will be able to come out to Italy in pursuit. Therefore I suggest that while you and John are enjoying the quiet (and the cold!) of Siena, I pay a short visit to Rome. Afterwards you, on the pretext of business, will bring Susi there and leave her to keep me company. Once I get her to myself, everything should be quite easy. Beginning by dropping a few hints as to the young man's real character, I should find the rest fairly simple.

"Once away from his influence she will probably listen to reason. In any case, we can rejoin you at

the villa, and, when my husband and I return to England, you can take Susi travelling for a while. There is nothing like that for making a girl forget; and now good-bye."

The pretty cashier looked at her enviously as she swept through the rooms out into the sunny street, followed by her good-looking companion, and thought how delightful it must feel to be a heroine of the real romance.

Again we meet David upon the railway; but upon this occasion his journey is untinged with adventure. Under a cold, grey January sky the train races by past mile after mile of sodden country, broken by dismal towns. To him the weather matters little, for at last he is in pursuit of Susi. Ethel Steel, having guessed at his secret, had sent him an Italian grammar with her good wishes before he started. It lay open upon his knee at the following exercise:

"The wedding of the Princess Strozzi and the Marquis de Seta took place last week in beautiful Florence. The bride, ingenuous as a dove, was dressed in white China crêpe, and wore a veil with orange blossoms; the Marchioness Chigi wore a blue silk gown with a long train; the Duchess Parigini had a gown of very old lace, and wore a magnificent coral necklace; the Baroness Camilli was dressed in red velvet and had a girdle of brilliants; the bride's sister was a dream in a simple muslin gown with

large sleeves." And then his thoughts wandered on from weddings to Susi.

He arrived in Siena upon an icy day in driving rain, finding a few lines from Susi to announce depressing news. It appeared that Luigi, after arriving at the villa, had found himself obliged to go to Rome for a day or two upon business; and she had accompanied him, rather than remain behind with the uncongenial Professor. Of course, this meant that David's telegram, announcing his departure, had missed her, but, in any case, he gathered from her letter that her absence would be of short duration; also — and this was reassuring — she announced that she intended to seize this opportunity, now that her brother was away from his work at last, to talk him over to the idea of her marriage with an Englishman. She promised to telegraph the date of her return. This letter, evidently written in the haste accompanying a sudden departure, was undated. There was nothing to do except to wait. In the afternoon he left the hotel and found himself drifting with the crowd down the narrow-paved street constituting the principal thoroughfare of the town. At all hours people throng the roadway; the stream of pedestrians interrupted by ox-carts, eccentric-looking trams without lines under the indulgent control of overhead wires, and an occasional valiant spirit upon a bicycle.

To-day being Saturday there was even more traffic

than usual, and although no merchandise was visible, it proved quite difficult to work a way through the dense mass assembled near the steps of the local club. David, however, was resolute, for he had resolved to make the time pass by seeing the picture-galleries; and towards the end of the afternoon his mind had become a kind of kaleidoscope, in which countless figures in felt hats and long coats jostled for prominence with specimens of early Italian art. There was one particular cabman, who, having driven him from the station, offered a merry and disarming friendliness, bobbing up constantly in his path to point out the immense advantage to be derived from a drive along hilly roads inches deep in thick yellow mud, at a moderate tariff, and (as an extra inducement) "with only one horse." And then his image would be shut out by ancient pictures, representing cheerful incidents in the lives of saints, when hot warming-pans were held firmly against the waists of holy men, to be endured with the same weary smile as the chanted eulogies of a robust choir (literally) engaging their ear upon the other side. Susannah, whose general appearance denoted an almost incredible weakness towards temptation upon the part of the elders, was succeeded by St. Anthony, who, approached by the devil armed with a stout club, eyed him gloomily, and as though slightly disappointed at the absence of more dangerous attractions. And then St. Catherine swooned in a hundred different

pictures, to the manifest concern of those disciples whose duty it was to uphold her pious but solid frame. David was not insensible to the beauty of many of these old masterpieces, but he felt that if people should in the future become enthusiastic before him about the art treasures to be seen here, his memory would first revert to the quaint representations of heaven in one corner and of hell in the other. Heaven where, after formal introduction, nuns and bishops danced round and round the mulberry bush, or formed up in lines to execute a kind of dignified polka. Hell, where inconsiderate fiends dropped cannon-balls upon the plump and nude figures of the damned. . . . Through it all, whether in the galleries where, after hundreds of years, some of the pictures looked as though they had been painted yesterday, or in the streets outside, he was conscious of a curious sense of stability: everything here seemed unchanged since the Middle Ages. In speaking of the local history the great plague is used as a useful reference for the settling of dates! Everywhere — down the steep, dark streets, out of the glorious gateways, the spirit of the past walks with the stranger far into the open country, past brown monks and gentle peasants, through woods of ilex and miles of red soil carpeted with wild lavender: a land of russet and grey.

David, looking upon the view, dreamed of bringing Susi back in the summer when all this should

flower, when the sun would touch the vivid violet hills now crowned with mist; and his steps quickened unconsciously, as he thought of the dear and close companionship that might be his in that future.

When he came back muddy and tired, it was to find that nothing further had come from Rome. He had already asked when the note had been left at the hotel; but unfortunately no one could remember anything about the matter. It had evidently arrived during one of those intervals best described "twixt the concierge and the clerk." A discreet message to the villa, however, had elicited the information that Susi was not there. He wandered forth, lonely and restless. The side streets were darker still by now, and he stood for a moment looking down one of these, and thinking how natural it would seem if some brightly-dressed gallant of the fifteenth century should suddenly appear from under one of the dim doorways. He ceased to wonder at the old stories of plots and poison, of romance told by the side of sun-splashed fountains in walled courts, or else of daggers gripped under cloaks at night in the lurking shadows — the moonlit approach of the unsuspecting victim, a short, choking gasp, and another dead body for the watch to find at dawn. Even as he stood, so strange a procession swung round the corner, he could hardly persuade himself that he was not still in the midst of an idle fancy.

First walked half a dozen figures robed in black,

closely masked, and with long, pointed hoods. They carried lanterns, although it was still day, and, contrary to Italian custom, walked rapidly, swinging from side to side. Behind came four more of these sinister apparitions bearing a coffin covered with black and silver. There was something so gruesome about the spectacle that, involuntarily, he recoiled at their approach. Upon this, with a laugh, the leader chattered something as he passed, holding the mask still closer about his hidden face.

David followed to the corner, and saw them still chattering, still hurrying under their burden — a curious medley of black and silver, lit by the orange flare of their swaying lanterns. They disappeared down another alley of mystery and silence. At this moment, although by no means usually nervous, he almost jumped, for someone touched his shoulder, and, turning, he came face to face with the Professor, who stood looking at him with an odd expression upon his face. It seemed to David that Arkwright was pleased — almost triumphant — at seeing him; but at the same time he himself was too much absorbed by the prospect of gleaning news about Susi to pay much attention to the other's mood.

He learnt that Arkwright and Luigi were staying at the villa; but that the latter was going upon the following day to join Susi and Maude in Rome.

"To bring them here?" asked David eagerly.

He did not dare to speak of Susi particularly,

and heartily wished that all necessity for such discretion were at an end. A strange light flashed over Arkwright's face; it was as though the secret hiding within his soul had peered out of his eyes for a moment. Then he answered quietly:

"I am sure that they will come back here perhaps on Monday or Tuesday. Meanwhile Luigi is in rather an irritable frame of mind; really, I think that all this writing has been too much for his nerves. He sent it off to-night—the parcel of corrected proofs, I mean—and he is like a bear with a sore head. So I warn you not to come to the villa before he goes. Upon the other hand, I shall be all alone there to-morrow evening, and I should be delighted if you would take pity upon me there, and share my evening. It is a twenty minutes' drive. Why not stay the night?"

This last suggestion David declined, but he expressed an almost eager willingness to come down upon the following evening, adding: "Perhaps by then you will have heard more definite news as to when the rest of the party arrive."

Again the queer expression flickered over the Professor's face, but once more it instantly vanished. They were walking back to the hotel, and he began talking about Siena.

"One soon grows fond of the place," he said, "even becoming accustomed to the clanging of the church bells that marks every hour, and to the pun-

gent smell from the tannery which has been in existence for ages. In fact, the townspeople will say that it serves to remind you of their beloved St. Catherine, whose father followed that aromatic trade."

David remarked upon the apparent lack of change, and upon the air of mystery that seemed to haunt the old town, which seemed quite undisturbed since the Middle Ages.

"It must strike every stranger," replied Arkwright. "Yes, I fancy everything goes on here just the same, century after century. Only last night a carabinieri killed his mistress (for no particular reason except he had heard that he might be transferred to another town), and then shot himself. Somehow the act seems exactly to suit the Sienese setting. After all, the best solution to the problem of Life is Death, and it is also the most simple. You, as a soldier, should approve of the elemental forces!"

"Not of murder," answered David with some amusement; "but, in the abstract, I think that most people prefer to go straight ahead and to avoid complications. I cannot understand what is known as a complex individual — full of odd cranks and corners, like a house full of narrow stairs and dark passages."

"You would prefer the open air, the obvious," answered Arkwright. "When you grow older —" He stopped abruptly for a moment, and then went on: "If you had had more experience of life per-

haps you would agree with me that the end must justify the means — not always, but often. The dark stairs may show a quicker and more certain means of reaching that end than the broad highway may offer, and the end is all that matters.”

David was silent; one does not like to be told that one is ignorant, and he wondered idly why Arkwright had so suddenly changed the beginning of his sentence. Then, looking up, he found that they had arrived before the hotel. His companion refused to come in, saying that it was already late; turning back to repeat his invitation for the following evening, before he vanished amongst the moving shadows of the street.

David spent the next day in much the same aimless manner. A guide-book informed him hopefully that there were twenty-five churches which it was imperative that he should visit — adding that the others were of less immediate importance.

Appalled at such a prospect, he amused himself by watching the peasants coming in from the country for their weekly distraction; which seemed to consist in gravely studying the pictures in the comic magazines hung outside the newspaper shops; and in walking slowly up and down the principal street, the same faces appearing and re-appearing continually: a stage crowd in real life.

David wandered amongst them — a prey to the unutterable desolation that assails a man amongst

strangers of whose language he is entirely ignorant. He entered a church, and looked at the old carved pulpit; some of the faces with their long eyes, fluffy hair, and slim bodies, not without a quaint likeness to Susi. Suddenly he was overwhelmed by the approach of an ancient crone clearly levelling a hideous malediction against him.

Wondering of what offence he had been guilty he left the building, considerably to the surprise of the old woman, who had really been saying:

“The Signore may well marvel at the treasure: an American offered twenty million lire to take it away. And yet he did not give me more than the bare fee for showing him round our saintly edifice: not an extra soldi! Let the Signore believe me — not the price of a single coffee!”

In the vestibule of the hotel an Englishwoman was talking in shrill tones to a priest.

“I cannot say that I think this place very lively; give me Florence and the ‘Uffuzzy.’” And the chatter that he understood seeming even more trying to the nerves than the incomprehensible Italian, he went up to his room.

A wonderful view was visible from the window upon a fine day; but the sky was dark and threatening, the atmosphere damp and foggy.

In the street below a soldier talked in bitter tones to a sympathetic listener. His voice, hoarse with emotion, and his many gestures, would have done

credit to an operative training. David concluded that the poor wretch had landed himself in some scrape; whereas the soldier (a drill sergeant) was speaking of some new conscripts:

"Miserable asses!" he exclaimed, "sheep that amble without the intelligence to keep in line! While I, even I, must lead the life of a dog to make them presentable"; and at this moment one of the ambling sheep happening to pass, the sergeant, with a beaming smile, slapped him on the shoulder and offered him a cigarette.

David sat down wearily to wrestle with the Pluperfect Subjunctive, of which he had never even heard before, and about which his distracted brain felt inclined to ask in despair: animal, vegetable, or mineral? He was determined to learn something of the language which Susi could speak as well as her own — but at present his labours seemed hopeless, and he was thankful when the clanging bells announced that it was time to wash and change for dinner. He had contrived some excuse to avoid joining Arkwright until after the meal. He could not refuse to cheer his solitary evening, but he did not care to dine there in the absence of Luigi.

The principal street was cheerful and crowded, notwithstanding the cold and the drizzle, when he started upon his drive down to the villa; but the cramped side alleys were wholly plunged in darkness, except where an occasional lamp stained the wall in

its immediate neighbourhood with a sullen yellow. Looking back he saw the huge church of San Domingo standing with one humped shoulder against a weeping sky, and wondered to the sound of the thronging voices of the awakened bells if it ever stopped raining in Siena. Only once did he break silence to ask by signs of the cab-driver (he had secured that same joyous creature of the day before) the reason why the little stables along the road were decorated with lit candles, bright pieces of paper and tinsel — in one case even with a star of electric light. The man strove by elaborate gesticulation to express that it was the feast of a saint, who, although debarred by the extreme poverty necessary to holiness from possessing anything more choice than a pet pig, yet loved every dumb creature, extending his blessing over all the animal world. The expressive pantomime was very amusing, and lasted for most of the drive; the driver turning round upon the box and allowing his little horse to trot unchecked down what seemed to David an interminable stretch of mud and slush, until they turned up a rough track bordered with trees and stopped with a jerk in front of the villa.

It seemed a lonely place, and when David had found the bell it sent a desolate peal echoing down what sounded like endless corridors. Arkwright himself opened the door.

“I am afraid that you will find the place rather

dismal," he said. "I am extremely glad of your society. It has been a trying day; but Luigi went off all right. I will tell your driver where to wait; it is too wet for him to stay here — what odious weather!" and he spoke to the man, rejoining David who awaited him in the hall.

"This is the sitting-room, left exactly as his mother remembered it when she was a girl."

It was a stiff little apartment pervaded by the musty atmosphere of disuse. In one corner stood a marble bust covered with a piece of muslin; some formal pieces of furniture belonging to the same date as our early Victorian, and a few family photographs, mostly taken after death, completed a decorative scheme that did not err upon the side of gaiety.

Crossing the hall again they entered a room of considerable size, to which comfortable chairs and a roaring wood fire gave a cheerful appearance, and lit by a hideous bronze chandelier, which David was told had been in the family hundreds of years. In one corner was a sort of sideboard covered with bottles and jars, and what Susi called "scientific mess," and a great bowl of faded spring flowers speaking of her departure had been pushed aside to make room for papers and writing materials. In another corner was a large bronze statue looking rather grim and out of place.

"That," remarked the Professor, "as you are doubtless aware, represents Justice."

His face quivered as he spoke: he was altogether restless and agitated. However, since he seemed obviously glad of company, the only course to adopt was that of trying to make him talk about what interested him most, and so David asked politely after the new book.

"I will show you some duplicate proofs of the illustrations," answered Arkwright with alacrity; "make yourself comfortable in that arm-chair. Here are some, and I will get the rest out of the cupboard behind you."

As he spoke he held out a portfolio, which David opened upon his knee, preparing himself with some dismay to examine the complicated diagrams of which the "illustrations" appeared to consist.

He leaned back in his chair, holding up the sheet towards the light from the chandelier above, and, even as he did so, in a second — noiselessly and without the faintest warning — a wet, foul-smelling mask was pressed down upon his face. It was like a ghastly nightmare! Of course he struggled, the prey to an inconceivable horror, but the thing was too sudden — he had no chance; and the sickly loathsome chloroform was numbing his senses and choking his breath, whilst yet it seemed that he was making gigantic efforts to get free. And then he felt the life go out of his limbs: slowly, gradually, each nerve seemed to relax and to drop gently, dragging his whole being into an abyss — immeasurable, un-

fathomable — always falling, falling; even that horrible deathly smell had gone, or else he was unconscious of it now, unconscious of everything — gliding, slipping into eternity.

The eternity lasted for a very short time, and then he awoke feeling unspeakably weak, his head throbbing as though it must burst, and his tongue and throat dry and swollen. He tried to move, but found this impossible — he was securely bound to the huge bronze statue in the corner.

Before his aching eyes Arkwright's face seemed to jump up and down as though upon wires.

As a matter of fact, the Professor was looking at his watch to give the chloroform a few more seconds in which to wear off, then he spoke.

"You see, I made my preparations rather well," he began. "I am sorry that I was obliged to drug you, but I guessed you to be pretty strong." David heard him in amazement; either he must be still in the throes of a nightmare, or Arkwright must have gone mad.

Again he tried to pull his arms free, but only to find that the straps with which he was tied cut his skin at the first effort to move. Yes, it was all real enough — just as he felt so idiotically weak: then the second theory must be correct, and now, as he looked at the man again, he saw that his eyes held the crazy light of insanity — the chained thing lurk-

ing in the shadow had got free. He noticed that Arkwright held a crumpled letter in his hand, and began to speak again in the toneless voice of someone in a white fury — who has controlled a deadly anger for weeks, and who is able to indulge it at last.

“Of course,” he observed, “it is really useless to explain my action. Naturally you will pretend to know nothing, so perhaps you might like to read this. I found it upon my wife’s table two months ago. She had just finished writing it when she was called to the telephone — and then she forgot it. By the time she remembered, I had bribed the servant to say that the letter had been burnt together with some circulars lying in the same heap. I merely tell you this to enable you to see that my knowledge of the matter has been kept entirely to myself. Not a living soul suspects that I know anything.” He smiled with a cruel and cunning triumph which brought home to David more than anything else the terrible truth: that he was alone in this empty house at the mercy of a maniac.

He tried to steady his eyes and read the letter held out to him:

“DEAR MR. STRANGWAYS,— I forgot to tell you that, when you see Mr. Steel, you must upon no account let him guess that you have heard anything about his behaviour to me (either lately or in the

past). As you know, my conscience has nothing with which to reproach me. I always guessed what kind of a man he was: it was my fault for not trusting my instinct sooner. However, no harm is done: in fact, I have, in consequence, been able to be of some use to you and to Susi. If, however, John should know of his conduct towards me: either lately or in the past — it would be a serious matter. So please remember this when next you meet Mr. Steel, whatever your own feelings may be towards him.— Yours sincerely, MAUDE ARKWRIGHT."

"She was not mistaken," remarked Arkwright; "it is a serious thing for you, and nothing that you may say will make any difference. For I took measures instantly to find out the truth. Money is useful sometimes, and so I discovered from the servants at Cheyne Row that you had constantly been there — all through the summer."

As a result of the anæsthetic David's tongue was now so painful that he could hardly speak: he just managed to articulate "Not to see your wife."

"I suppose, then, that it was not to see my wife that you came to my house immediately upon returning from manœuvres: an interview from which you seem to have retreated in some confusion? Now, Mr. Steel, I married entirely under the influence of a hope which can never be realised. I was never what you would call 'in love,' but I meant to keep

my wife to myself. I believe, and nothing will shake my belief, that you have made love to her. I believe that she has been continually pestered by you lately: probably unsuccessfully trying to bring forward some imaginary hold you had upon her in the past, and that you are a scoundrel. In a few minutes I shall have done a good turn to society, and incidentally to myself, for there will be one scoundrel the less in the world. I repeat, I have laid my plans most carefully.

"It was I who sent the telegram to Luigi purporting to come from my wife — and summoning him to Rome on account of his sister's sudden illness. He will arrive to find her quite well. I had your movements watched by a London agency; thus I learnt that you were coming out here — and was of course prepared for the exact moment of your arrival. I remember how eager you were to find out about Maude's movements!" He paused, and David tried to speak but found that it was impossible; he signed for water, but the Professor went on speaking, and he suddenly felt a dull wonder as to how long all this would last.

"You see," he went on, "I had to be very careful and clever about my arrangements: hiding the straps and the chloroform, and so on. I was so very much afraid that something would interfere; but nothing did: it was all much easier than I could have hoped. There was only one difficulty. You see, Luigi has

a delusion"; he lowered his voice confidentially. "I believe he thinks that I am going mad! Is it not ridiculous? He says nothing, of course, but he keeps watching me. They are all watching me; it is a conspiracy. I only got the servant to go away for the evening when he knew that you were coming to keep me company — to keep me company —" again that inhuman smile. "He thinks that you are staying the night — so does the cabman: I told him so at the door. It is all Luigi's fault that they are suspicious, but I do not bear him malice, poor fellow. For, you see, it is really Luigi who is not quite himself — overwork, you know; and now" — resuming his ordinary tone of voice — "we come to business. This" — and he took a little phial from his pocket — "contains the dried secretion of the poisonous gland of a snake: you may have heard of it, the diamond or puff adder? This" — producing it from another pocket — "is a hypodermic syringe. Now I might have given you some more chloroform and — have saved myself further trouble! But I wanted to have the satisfaction of telling you that *I knew*. Well, an injection of this serum will produce paralysis of the heart and death (in a not particularly pleasant form). It has always been my custom to prove my assertions: in fact, to accompany lecture by practical demonstration. I propose to do so now."

Escape was impossible. David fixed his eyes full

upon Arkwright and gathered together his reeling senses: anyhow, he would meet death without fear.

He felt his sleeve pulled back, and then a sudden sharp sting above the wrist. Immediately afterwards, and before he had time to realise it, the straps were unfastened and fell to the ground, while Arkwright, walking to a curtain at the other end of the room, drew it back and opened a door leading into the garden.

"Here is your way out, if you have had enough of my society. I hope that you have not been bored. The poison may take a few minutes to work — perhaps a quarter of an hour. Good-bye."

David struggled to his feet, grasping the statue for support: Arkwright had gone — and he was alone. He summoned all his strength to crawl to the garden door, and there the sudden blast of cold air as it struck his face, blistered from the chloroform, revived him, and he staggered down the little avenue of closely planted cypress that led to the road, helping himself along by clutching at the trunks of the trees. He noticed how his hand shook with weakness as he pulled out his watch and looked at the time by the light of a watery moon. It was just upon eleven; in so short a time how much had happened! The watch slipped from his fingers — after all, what was a watch to a dead man? And he was half dead already. Again a cold wave of horror gripped him, and his limbs seemed turning slowly to lead. He was

possessed of one blind desire — if only he could reach Susi — then death would not matter; nothing would matter. Somehow in his confused brain she was connected with his struggles to get down to the road.

The numbness was creeping over him. Only a few minutes could have passed — and yet — he had reached the end of the avenue. But there was no Susi upon the road which lay before him dripping and deserted. His dim eyes made out the town in the distance far above him, and at the same time the bells rang out stirring, appealing, clanging; and one, the last, deep-toned and tender, like a mother soothing her tired child.

Yes, the numbness was worse — it was not going to be so terrible after all; if only he could get to Susi!

And then suddenly, from the window above, came a ghastly sound: the shriek of laughter without merriment — the cracking, jarring laughter of the insane. There was no one to hear, for David had fallen in a heap by the roadside.

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It had frozen, and the road to Florence was hard as iron; the old road that winds its golden way between Florence by the broad river, and ancient Siena perched high amongst the Apennines. This morning the old town looked like a cluster of diamonds flung amongst the hills. Brilliant sunshine sparkled upon the Duomo, hid amongst the belfries, and laid a light finger over the silver countryside.

Susi sat on a rocky mound that looks over mile upon mile of road and slope and valley far away to the farthest line of the horizon ; all rosy with sun and snow.

By her side sits David : not his ghost, although you might think so — judging from his appearance. Susi has had an anxious time ever since the moment — now some weeks ago — when she had hastily returned to Siena with Luigi to take up the burden of the situation upon her slight shoulders. And this situation was complicated enough : the Professor raving mad, in charge of a terrified servant, who had returned “ one little five minutes after eleven ” to find the English stranger unconscious upon the road outside the villa. He himself had been of opinion that the stranger should be carried to the mortuary in the neighbouring monastery since he thought that a strange corpse might be unlucky in the house. But while he was debating this with the cottagers next door — who were willing to lend their donkey cart for the purpose, David opened his eyes, and, scarcely having time to wonder if the next world really held so strange a flavour of garlic, had fainted again. This sign of life on the part of the corpse had wrecked their programme, and, mercifully, a priest happened to pass who remembered seeing David in the hall of the hotel where he himself was listening to the random remarks of an old English lady. More fortunately still, the respect and affection in which he was held caused

an immediate change to be made in the direction of the donkey cart.

When Susi arrived she telegraphed to Ethel Steel, who came at once, having gently broken to David's mother — luckily unable to take so long a journey herself — the unaccountable fact that she no longer held the monopoly of illness in the family. Her presence was exceedingly welcome. Luigi, wholly absorbed in the difficult task of getting Arkwright back to England, had left Susi in the charge of Maude who, it need scarcely be said, vanished as soon as Ethel appeared upon the scene. No one understood David's repeated allusions to poison and to approaching death — in fact, it was some little time before he was allowed to speak of his experiences at all. Fortunately, however, his convalescence was swift.

"The Signore," said the little doctor, "has the strength of an ox: drugging, exposure — why, he must be hard indeed to kill! I congratulate the Signora upon the possession of so splendid a specimen of humanity."

"Alas!" replied Ethel in halting Italian, "he is the property of the Signorina over there."

She had completely fallen under the charm of Susi, and reassured her as to the approval of David's mother.

"You see," she explained. "My cousin-in-law will love you for yourself, and then she has carefully looked you up in what my vulgar nephews call the

Stud Book. She is not a snob; but nowadays old ladies look upon that red volume as their only rock of refuge amid the maelstrom of modern life in London."

Of course, Susi had really and completely made up her mind. She and David were sitting close together now, looking down upon the curling road studded with white oxen drawing every kind of load and sulkily pulling out of the way of passing motors. Lazily and vaguely they watched one of these crawling like a black beetle through the narrow streets of a distant village far below them through the clear air — and as they watched they talked. She put her hands over his eyes as he turned them suddenly in a certain direction.

"You are not to look near that horrible villa," she exclaimed.

"It is all over now, and besides it could not be helped," he answered philosophically. "It does not matter now; nothing matters except you," and he pulled down her hands and kissed them.

"I wonder," she said thoughtfully after a moment, "whether that Arkwright woman knew about the Professor seeing her letter to Luigi. Ethel (what an angel she is — dear Ethel — to say that she wanted to spend this glorious morning in the picture gallery), Ethel thinks that she wrote the letter and then left it there on purpose, but I do not agree. She would be far too frightened of the ef-

fect upon Mr. Arkwright; although she was not fond of him she made him a good wife — even Ethel admits that.” She stopped and watched the motor climbing the long curve towards them. “Poor Luigi,” she said, “he must be having a terrible time. It is just like him to stay until the end: the doctor says that it cannot be very far off now. By the bye, I wonder if Luigi will ever wake up to the fact that he is not living in the Middle Ages? Do you know, I believe, now, that he had what might be called a chivalrous romance about Maude Arkwright?”

“Impossible!” ejaculated David with conviction.

“Yes, really, and you know that women are never wrong upon that subject; after all, I found out about her liking some one else (I know that you will not let me say whom) in a second — just as that newspaper boy was rushing up the street. (Of course, without letting her discover anything about me; I never knew how she guessed that!) All the same, I should like to clear up one point: to learn the truth about her letter. I do not like to suspect people, and yet ——” As she spoke the motor that they had been so idly watching pulled up; the door opened, and to their stupefaction — out stepped the “Arkwright woman” herself.

“My dear children,” she called briskly up to them, “on no account must you get up and run away. To begin with, your fur coats are much too heavy for purposes of flight, and secondly I found out before

starting that a motor was coming here to fetch you at twelve. So we have time for a nice talk before I go on to catch the train de luxe from Milan, and so back to London."

She began to climb the bank towards them and Susi turned to David.

"Not here," she said in her low voice, and her face had grown suddenly pale. "It is too beautiful here; we will go down and meet her. Yes, I must speak to her. I should like to say that my motive is charity, but it is simple curiosity."

They met in a little brown hollow — sheltered and sunny — but shut away from the fairyland beyond.

Maude possessed a capable and useful brain, but I repeat that it was not preternaturally quick. She had therefore taken the precaution of carefully determining what to say long before she had caught up with the lovers. This method she found (as upon a former occasion in a certain little restaurant) by far the most reliable plan of campaign.

She did not attempt to shake hands, but seemed perfectly friendly, and at peace with all the world.

"I wanted to speak to you both for your sake and for mine," she remarked. "For yours, because I think that you may still be in ignorance about some of the real facts of the case, and of course I can enlighten you upon any one of these; and for my own, because I should so much enjoy, for once in a

way, to speak my mind. Well, would you like to ask me anything?"

"Yes," replied Susi at once. "About the letter to Luigi that you — lost."

The pause was almost imperceptible, but Maude flushed.

"Yes," she said quietly. "I have just come from an interview with Ethel Steel who has told me everything about that horrible night. Of course, she will always believe that I wrote the note and left it there on purpose for John to read; but I was called to the telephone and forgot about it afterwards. Then, when I remembered, the servants said that it had been burnt, together with a pile of circulars. The outside sheet happened to be blotted, so they thought that it was meant to be thrown away. Do you believe me, Susi? Be frank, I do not mind — much."

"Yes," replied Susi, without a pause this time. "I am quite sure that you are speaking the truth."

"How could I want John to see it when I knew that he was always trying to hide his ridiculous jealousy, and when I knew that there was something wrong with his brain before we married." Her audience gasped. "Yes, not because he asked me to marry him," and she actually laughed cheerfully. "Before we became engaged he said he ought to tell me that he had fallen upon his head in some bear fight when he was at Oxford (imagine John

bear fighting!), and that he had been ill for a long time afterwards. He added that since then he had had one or two sudden shocks — pieces of bad news, and so on, and that each time his head had felt queer. Oh, yes, I knew all that!" she said simply.

There was a short silence, then David spoke:

"I must ask you something too. Your husband evidently meant to poison me that night, but ——"

"Yes," interrupted Maude, "he did his best: circumstances were against him. Just before he left London he had one of those black fits of depression which made me think that one day he might be tempted to commit suicide. He had been absorbed in that dull book which he and Luigi were writing, and, once the work was over, he felt the reaction, I suppose. I hastened our departure in consequence, hoping that change of scene might do him good. It appears that he bought this horrid snake stuff and carried it about in his pocket; I never noticed; in any case, one bottle more or less of those nasty germs would convey nothing to my mind. Mr. Strangways, however, knew more about them than I did, and perhaps (although he always laughed at the idea when we spoke of it together) he may have been infected by my fear that John might make away with himself. In any case, he stole the phial and threw away the contents: replacing them by some innocent compound mixed (I believe, David,

that you are learning Italian) with the aid of aqua pura!"

"But why did I feel — that night — as if I was dying?" he asked.

"Because the most complete ignoramus knows that people do not take large quantities of chloroform immediately after dinner: it is a thing that is never done." She added this so severely that David felt almost inclined to apologise. "And now," she resumed. "Of course, our lives divide here. I know quite well that this is the last time that either of you will ever want to speak to me; perhaps that is why I want to say everything that is in my mind. This is just as great a comfort to me as a good cry is to some people; and one that I have seldom enjoyed. For I have had to plan and pretend ever since I put my hair up — and oh, one gets so tired sometimes! I wonder why women should ever want to go upon the stage when they get so many opportunities for acting in real life: I suppose that it is because some of us cannot do without the applause. I was always poor, and so I simply could not afford to be sincere. If every woman had a nice little private income we should — as a sex — be just as frank as men. You, Susi, will always be perfectly straightforward, because you have a few hundreds of your own and need not go to David every time that you want to buy a hairpin.

"Now at last my plans are accomplished. Please

do not look so shocked: I told you that I was going to speak openly. Poor John! Whether he lives or not, can make no difference now to my life. I did my best to make him comfortable, and I shall not do anything to disgrace him. I could never be disreputable, and under no circumstances should I ever marry again; because, you see, I am very well off now."

There was something so artless in this last remark that her audience laughed in spite of themselves.

But she had evidently not finished, for she asked Susi abruptly: "Did you guess about Luigi's feeling for me?"

Susi nodded.

"There was no harm in it; I am not one of *that* sort," she remarked proudly. "All the same, I feel sorry now that he must know how I lied about you — David. Somehow — I wonder if you will understand. I feel as if I had put out my tongue at the Chevalier Bayard." She was silent a moment, then resumed: "Perhaps some day he will understand: tell him that his saint caught pins and needles from standing too long upon her pedestal, and so she ran away and dropped her halo in the dust. He will pick it up and give it to another woman some day."

"Yes, I will tell him; but not now — not for a long time," replied Susi slowly.

"You have been patient, both of you!" cried Maude, walking up and down; then, sitting upon a rock opposite them, she remarked, "I have very lit-

tle more to say. Do you know what strikes me most about the whole affair? And my opinion is worth having, because I played the part of wicked adventuress (although I have never had an adventure, and hope that I never shall). Well! it is this — the simplicity of men. I tried to fool you, Susi, without the slightest success. You are only a girl, young and inexperienced; and yet when in Rome I tried to tell you a story about your dear David you simply burst out laughing!

“Compare your conduct with that of poor John, whose intellect was admittedly of a high order; what happened to him at the first hint of that same little story (which he was never meant to hear)?

“Then look at Luigi. You, Susi, have often told me that you would be quite content with half his intelligence. Well, I told him that little story quite simply — in the most unconvincing and amateur manner and (to use one of his own laboratory expressions) ‘the results of my experiment were even more far-reaching and comprehensive than I had any right to expect.’ As for you, David, you are the most credulous of the three. I took you in when I was a raw girl! Do you remember thinking me a poor little thing who led a hard dull life, and was the devoted slave of her stern father? (By the bye, it was very clever of Ethel Steel to write to my father for a ‘character’ of you to show to Luigi upon his return!)

"I once imagined myself fond of you, David. Of course, Susi never guessed it, although I found out that she cared for you the day when the newspaper boy ——"

Susi blushed scarlet, while David rose hastily and exclaimed:

"You must not think me rude, but really you are talking great nonsense."

"It is my last chance and I have nearly done — only I must say what I think about the simplicity of man! When I considered the matter I found out that you were only a dear, delightful peg upon which to hang my dreams — just as little girls love to dress a doll. Those dreams which are of no use, but with which every one is born just the same: like an appendix! When I found out that I laughed, and then suddenly I felt very angry — angrier than I had ever been in my life — because when I *thought* I liked you, you showed so plainly how sure you were that you did not like me! My anger did a great deal of mischief: much more than I contemplated. But that is all over, and now you will marry each other and be happy ever after. (I wonder where I last heard that quotation?)" She rose and shook out her skirt; then suddenly raised her head and said: "Do you know of what you all remind me — you David, Luigi, and John — just 'Three blind mice.'"

SECOND-HAND ADVENTURE

THE unexpected happens so frequently that one really questions whether unexpectedness is not really extinct. For instance: when the Senior Partner pressed a cheque into the hand of Melton Mohair, saying genially, "You must not overdo the brainfag. Go away for a week — see fresh faces — get out of your groove," this honest lad really thought that the skies would fall. He was wrong; and indeed it would have sadly inconvenienced the Senior Partner if they had, as he was contemplating a trip to Paris with Mohair's widowed but attractive step-mother, and was anxious to get him out of the way.

Now Melton was very young and very literal. He determined to obey the Senior Partner as usual, but, as to seeing life, he was just as far from knowing how to obtain such a view as he was from devising a sortie from the narrow groove. To see fresh faces was not so difficult — really he need do no more than look out of the window of his London bedroom to carry out this part of the programme.

Because of what he read in a newspaper with a genius for advertisement he found himself at a small but fashionable hotel upon the East Coast.

You will recognise the place immediately when I tell you that the sea was, in this district, too refined to produce shrimps, and too fashionable for any but the most completely mixed bathing. He felt a little solitary as he sat at dinner goggling at the occupants of the other little tables and wondering who and what they were, as every true Englishman always does at once. Nobody else was alone; there were depressed parties of three, and cheerful parties of four, and even more successful *tête-à-têtes* — invariably of two.

At length, half-way through the meal, a girl arrived and took possession of a solitary table at the other end of the room.

The ingenuous Melton pitied the poor girl for having to face a concentrated stare from the entire company, and was quite sure that she must regret the somewhat striking colours of her attire.

His mute sympathy was none the less sincere because it was totally superfluous, and he felt relieved to notice that her appetite seemed unaffected by bashfulness for it would have done credit to a crocodile, and then, reproaching himself for noticing such things, he proceeded to satisfy his own.

It is to be presumed, however, that this sympathy had in some mysterious way reached the young woman, since, after dinner, she chose a chair quite near, and he could not help regretting that her impassioned absorption in a prospectus issued by the

Great Eastern Railway prevented him from warning her that she had accidentally strayed into the male smoking-room.

At this moment a youth peered in at one of the open windows. Melton had just time to observe that he seemed to belong to that objectionable type the City youth, who, getting a week off, is determined to make the most of it, when the subject of his silent criticism exclaimed "Hullo, Froggy!" and grinned.

To Melton's amazement this odious nick or pet name was evidently levelled at the girl. She looked up, but the youth had already gone; then, catching Melton's eye she sighed.

"That," she said bitterly and as though to herself, "that is what women have to put up with who depend for existence upon their daily bread!"

A moment's thought would have shown Melton that this is what we all do, but, unused to giving a moment to thought, he exclaimed impulsively:

"Disgusting! — Do you even know the bouncer?"

She paused slightly before replying. "Oh yes, I know him; in fact I might say that I know him quite as well as it is possible to know such a person. However, he has gone off by the night train to play in golf matches all over the place — and does not come back for several days, thank goodness! After all one must meet all sorts of people if one is to get out of one's groove."

"Why, that is just what I want to do," remarked Melton naïvely.

"I thought so," she replied, showing that marvellous intuition which women unite in declaring to be an entirely feminine attribute. "I thought so the moment I set eyes on you."

Melton, tingling with the nervous anticipation of a young bird screwing its neck over the edge of the nest for the first time, ordered two cups of coffee, and was instantly privileged to hear the story of her life.

"You must know," she began, "that you are not speaking to the ordinary kind of woman; I am even staying here under an assumed name." She stopped for a moment and Melton gasped with joy; here was mystery indeed — where was the narrow groove?

Although too conventional and retiring to long himself for a life of action, he was rejoiced to meet with a more original spirit.

It is the Melton Mohairs of this life who make born listeners. They are destined to become pillars of the offices who employ them, because as humble-minded as they are honest, they are content to remain in responsible but quite subordinate positions. Without them the confidence trick, quack remedies, bogus companies, would become extinct; there would be fewer doctors and political speeches — but in return for these benefits the world would become much duller and more prosaic. There is a great deal of

poetry in Humbug — and where would that be if the countless armies of the Humbugged were to vanish?

Meanwhile we must get back to the young woman; first explaining that, naturally eloquent, she took about a week telling her story, but in the hurry of this complicated age I have thought it best to give her autobiography in one draught as it were — whereas Melton took it in doses.

“My grandfather,” she began, “was unable to stand the English climate and after living abroad for some years he was made Bey of Hyperbole. He was an imperious man who kept open house and was nicknamed ‘Obey’ by the vast retinue who trembled at his lightest word. I spent two years in his palace surrounded by every luxury that wealth could procure. Unfortunately two men fell in love with me. In those climates people marry extremely young and, although you may not believe it, I was a lovely child. Both men were of the greatest importance, one was the Bey of Loofah, our next door neighbour: superbly handsome, brave as a lion; and with whom every woman in the place was madly in love (unfortunately he cheated at cards); the other, equally fascinating, was what answers to Lord Mayor of Hyperbole, and had already murdered two wives. When I explained my conscientious objections to marriage with either, the young Bey said that one bad habit should not shut him out from Paradise for ever, while the other observed that if he had forgotten the

incidents to which I referred, I might do the same; also that I could hardly have any personal feeling in the matter as I had never known either of the ladies.

"There is nothing so tiresome as argument. So I said good-bye to my grandfather and set sail for England. I seemed fated to be pursued by passion, for, before the ship had started, I received a formal proposal of marriage from the captain. However, the stewardess told me that he was a martyr to seasickness and, once under way, I saw nothing more of him. Well, to make a long story short, my life became a burden upon arriving in London. It seemed that the two native noblemen, so far from relinquishing their efforts, were resolved to squander their vast revenues, first in discovering my whereabouts and afterwards by vying with each other to bribe my affections with presents. At the boarding school in Dulwich whither my grandfather had sent me, I became the recipient of the strangest gifts. At first, when a ruby arrived as big as a hen's egg, the head mistress only said that she hated the vulgar display of false jewelry, and locked it up until the holidays. When, however, a striped baboon with an emerald collar, a hot water bottle in pure gold studded with precious stones, and finally a human slave — a little nigger dressed entirely in strings of aquamarines, arrived by Carter Paterson, she became really vexed. Most stupidly she returned these souvenirs on my behalf to the wrong names: so that

each suitor imagined that I was encouraging his efforts with a gift. Of course this made matters worse. Dusky envoys appeared with still choicer offerings and, when refused admittance at the area gate, swarmed up the pipes and handed parcels through the window of the dormitory.

"One day the kitchen chimney caught fire, and the cause was found to be a huge roll of tissue made of beaten silver (from the young Bey): 'To hang before the window in the Palace of Virgins where you are confined, so that the Passer by should not be struck dead by thy Beauty.' Miss Joppa the school-mistress who was fond of fresh air, merely characterised this poetic idea as symbolising the stuffy habits of Orientals who ignore hygiene; but she was otherwise incensed when in the middle of the half-burnt packet she came upon a large bottle of strong scent. 'To perfume and propitiate the She-Eunuch who keeps the Treasure of my heart (herself needing no fragrance beyond that of Youth and Beauty).' Matters hastened to a crisis after the summer holidays: which I spent motoring with her round the Lake District at my grandfather's expense. We had, of course, to come back before any one else, and when we drove up to the door of the school Miss Joppa uttered a shriek. The house had turned purple and pea-green, while the front door had come out in a rash so to speak: a perfect nightmare in yellow and red — covered with mysterious writing.

Miss Joppa had swooned, and, while they were tooting the motor-horn in her ear to bring her round, I made a round of inspection. Now Miss Joppa always announced in her prospectus that the whole place was painted and re-decorated every year: which really meant that during the holidays a caretaker went round with a pail of whitewash when she felt dull. We girls called the process 'a lick and a promise.' For once, however, the prospectus proved quite truthful. For again the pink and purple predominated everywhere inside the building, while streams of writing led up the staircase to the dormitory where they culminated in a riot of what looked like verse illustrated by some very odd drawings.

"When I got down again, Miss Joppa had come round and sat in the hall interviewing the caretaker, who was in the middle of a speech as I entered — 'which I thought the design was a bit flash as you might say but with you preferring a heathen nigger to me and my whitewash what was I to do? He said he had his orders and of course I thought they was from you natcherly. He seemed anxious to make a good job of it that I *will* say; and always tidied up as nice as nice every night before he left. Of course I kept him in his place — not having been in service with the Honourable Mrs. Seccotine for nothing. I never asked him inside my kitchen, no, not even for a cup of tea.'

" 'When did he go?' asked Miss Joppa feebly.

" 'Yesterday evening — stayed ever so late he did. Then he went to your little sitting-room, Miss, and did a few exercises there, kneeling down with his arms and legs over his head: what you call in the gymnasium 1st Series Abominable.'

" 'Abdominal,' said Miss Joppa icily. 'But why in my sitting-room?'

" 'In front of the noo statoo there.'

" Rising to her feet the school-mistress rushed to her room. In fact, by the time I reached it she had already enveloped the statue in her motor veil and a tablecloth; so that all I could see was the face of what appeared to be an idol.

" 'Knowing her to be High Church,' hissed the caretaker in my ear, 'I wouldn't have been surprised to see the Pope of Rome himself in her study, let alone any other graven image. It's a good thing for her she's not Chapel, that's all I can say.'

" Poor Miss Joppa she despatched telegrams to all the parents of her pupils announcing, truthfully enough, that owing to an unpleasant eruption in the vicinity of the school she must delay re-opening for the present. Then she telephoned to the Foreign Office.

" At dinner the poor thing appeared completely unhinged. As a rule, in times of crisis, every one received indiscriminate scolding, now her spirit seemed quite broken. Even to me — unwitting cause of all this commotion — she was so subdued

that I wept aloud from sympathy, I found that I was to sleep in a room usually occupied by one of the teachers; owing, so Miss Joppa said, to 'the profanation of the Dormitory.' I had never learnt to read or write my grandfather's adopted language so I could not understand the writing, but I grasped the delicate compliment conveyed by the prevalence of pink and purple: these were our racing colours, for he kept a famous stable of trained Zebras. Early next morning an Emissary from the Foreign Office arrived with an expert in Oriental Art, who seemed overcome by uncontrollable emotion upon seeing the decoration, and continually buried his face in his pocket-handkerchief, especially after inspecting the frescoes. He was then shut in with the statue to write his report; which he afterwards read to Miss Joppa, the Foreign Office Official, and myself. 'Seldom,' he said in a voice which boomed through the empty class room, 'have I been privileged to come across such a typical example of hyperbolic art. The whole house has been transformed into a Temple of Love — this indeed is announced in the sonnet upon the front door — a perfect example of the hyperbolic hexameter. The tradesman's entrance is graced by a triolet which is a pure joy to the dilettante. It is a diatribe against mixing commerce with passion and deplores the rise in price of a bride from a brace of pea fowl to a cassawary quiet to ride and drive: it also dilates with great freedom of de-

tail upon the policy of a cheap bargain sale when the wife has failed to produce —' here a cough from the official induced the savant to skip a page. 'We now come to the basement,' he announced. 'To left of hall small sitting-room decorated with a magnificent nude statue. This is life-size and represents wifely love.'

" 'Why wifely?' interrupted the official.

" 'Because by deftly inserting small pieces of cotton wool in each ear we see that the sculptor meant the statue to be deaf as well as blind and dumb. Leaving this gem we ascend the staircase decorated with fifteen stanzas of humorous verse: a comic and witty lampoon upon education. These are in the purest sixteenth century style and are naturally excessively coarse. But I have never come upon a more brilliant specimen — even in the British Museum. The poetry ascends like a fountain to the first floor, or *entre-sol*, where it turns off to the right, and crossing the dormitory ends in a river of amorous song within a cubicle designated as the Shrine of the Rosy Pearl, which I gather is a ——'

" 'Bed-sitting-room occupied by this young lady,' interposed Miss Joppa, curtly pointing at me.

" 'The poem, a riot of sentiment and imagery, culminates in the hope that the Crystal Moon of his dreams will consent to a speedy marriage, and preside over a prosperity boundless as space, gladdened by children numerous as the stars. I congratulate

you, Madam,' he concluded, turning to Miss Joppa — 'upon possessing these literary treasures — the drawings, too, unconventional as they appear to the tyro, are the work of a favourite pupil, if not the Master himself — the unique Gamboge. Yes, you are indeed to be envied.'

"He went out to gaze upon them again, while my heart melted at the anguish of my teacher, and I exclaimed, 'I will do anything — anything, to atone for this.'

" 'Listen,' said the Foreign Office Official, 'there is no time to lose. International politics are involved. If you married this man: the Bey of Loofah, we — that is to say Great Britain — would be put in an awkward position as, although you are English, it would be a *mésalliance* for the Bey. Complications would ensue, especially after the inquest.'

" 'Whose?' I asked.

" 'Yours,' he replied testily. 'You would most certainly be poisoned three days after by the Lord Chamberlain — it is part of the Court etiquette. We would be put to immense expense and — as fines are always paid out there in cowrie shells — the compensation would be insignificant. I advise you to fly — stain your face with walnut juice and dye your hair the colour of vanilla in order to distract attention from your appearance. I shall give out in the papers that you have perished.'

“ ‘How?’ asked my schoolmistress — ‘remember that her end must not bring discredit upon the school.’

“ ‘Sunstroke in the Lake District,’ he replied. ‘It always rains there, the slightest sunshine would cause shock and prove dangerous. All the inhabitants know that. Should you require recommendation for honest employment our interest is at your disposal,’ and he left with the expert to whom I took the liberty of presenting the statue. They packed it on the top of their taxi labelled ‘Prehistoric remains’; and when they had gone I sat down to tea. Poor Miss Joppa could touch nothing. Her heart was broken, although she said bravely that it couldn’t be helped. Looking at her fixedly I said:

“ ‘I have given the Caretaker the evening off — and I will look after the house as I am sure you need some fresh air. Did you renew the Insurance when it fell due?’

“ She replied in the affirmative, adding, ‘Do nothing rash’; at the same time she dashed for her hat and gloves and then out of the door, like a motor chased by the police. In an hour’s time the house was in flames, while, suitably disguised according to the advice received, I hurried down the street with the ruby concealed in a now empty matchbox and nothing in my pocket but my handkerchief.

“ Next day I saw on all the posters,

“ Shocking Catastrophe,
Beautiful girl victim,”

and the accounts were just as dramatic as you can imagine. Every one heard about the broken-hearted schoolmistress whose school, lately decorated regardless of expense, had been burnt to the ground. I was gratified to hear that the immense financial damage and the irreparable loss sustained through the destruction of art treasures (statuary by an anonymous but famous old master, and frescoes whose purity of colour was only equalled by the deep feeling expressed in every line), weighed as nothing with the devoted schoolmistress beside the fact that her favourite pupil had perished in the flames. The heart of her schoolmistress was, it transpired, not the only one affected: it appeared that one belonging to a crowned potentate had been seriously damaged — and that the hair of one of our most famous Oriental civic magnates had only *not* turned white, upon receipt of the news, because he used a celebrated ‘Restorer’ of which details and price were given in full.

“Personally I made the best of my way to the Official and demanded assistance. He recommended me to adopt a journalistic career as he said that he saw in me the glimmering of an imagination. I thanked him (he has since married Miss Joppa), and he gave me a letter of introduction. Within six weeks I was appointed feuilleton writer to the *Times*, at a fixed salary of three hundred a year, providing each story had a happy ending and that I brought in allusions of topical interest. I remember writing

an Eastern romance called the *Sultana*, which dealt with the great currant question, and another which had for title, 'Once bit twice shy,' and which was written round the cocoanut controversy. It had a stupendous success: my heroine was called Vi (of course) and my hero the Baron Epps. The circulation of the dear old paper went up by leaps and bounds: it became almost feverish.

"However journalistic jealousy switched me off that line, and I was side-tracked on to the *Encyclopædia*, and asked to bring it up to date. This request did not surprise me in the least for, when it first came out, one of my ancestors was given his choice of the whole alphabet as to which letter he would write up. He chose 'Z' preferring quality to quantity (at least so he said; but *I* think that he was just lazy).

"Well, to return to me: I refused. You see there is quite a demand for the *Britannica* amongst curiosity dealers and they said that it would spoil their trade. It cost me something to refuse (£50 a letter to be exact), but one has one's scruples." She paused a moment, and then continued, "Scruples are not very nourishing as a diet, and so I took up Expurgating for the Public Libraries."

"That must have been very painful work," murmured Melton.

"Horribly," she answered briskly. "You read all the novels and you put the really improper ones on a separate list — so that the libraries can order in a

double quantity in order to be ready for the rush. The difficulty is to find a really improper English novel. Authors do their best, especially the women: in fact, they often break down under the strain. A nerve doctor once told me that quite half his patients were people who had overworked themselves trying to write thoroughly incorrect fiction, yet somehow they fail. In fact I was so sorry for them that I always gave them the benefit of the doubt, and put them on the Star list whenever I could."

"What happens to all the other novels?" asked Melton.

"Oh, all sorts of things; they come in for Bazaars and Book Teas and the Best Spare Bedroom. Also a few by the very best authors lie about to help break the ice when a young man comes to call — and the girl looks tenderly at the last new thing in really good books, and says 'I do *love* reading.' I see that has happened to you," she exclaimed as Melton stared in amazement at this student of human nature. "What did you do? I suppose you sent her a book at once — prose if she was plain and poetry if she was pretty?"

"Yes," stammered the youth.

"Well, of course, she meant you to send her something to help out the thaw: you know what I mean! But another time a box of chocolates would really do better, with an entreaty not to read too much and tire herself. Talking of poetry by the by — a book-

seller I know always recommends Tennyson for blondes, and Longfellow for brunettes. I cannot tell you why except that he was a bimetallist."

"Of course lots of people have always wanted to marry you?" hazarded Melton. He was sitting by her side upon the shore as he said this, and hid his confusion by picking up handfuls of sand and pouring them slowly back again; which seemed rather an unprofitable occupation. She looked out to sea before replying.

"Not as many as you might think. They always complain that I am too brilliant, like a comet. What man would care to spend his time hanging on to a comet in order to keep up with it — and even then the tail might come off in his hand like a lizard's. Of course," she remarked, "you want to know what happened when I found myself with only a few pounds between myself and the workhouse. This was at the end of the holiday season when there was naturally a dwindling demand for novels and I found myself dismissed. I determined to stick to literature and tried reviewing; but that year there was no chance for any one. There was a rage for one particular reviewer: all the important editors fought for his opinion, and the poor authors nearly killed themselves in their efforts to attract his attention. People say that he made thousands; and he kept about half-a-dozen clerks hard at work, taking down his dictated articles."

"What were his particular qualifications?" asked Melton.

"He could neither read nor write," she replied quietly. "Of course in these days of universal education he stood alone, nobody else had a chance."

"Then it isn't necessary for reviewers to read the books they review?" questioned Melton.

"What a good thing you met me — so that I can haul you out of the narrow groove before you get stuck," answered the young woman, and went on at her usual brisk rate, without waiting for his fervent assent.

"Well some one suggested to me that I should become the first female literary agent. Now a literary agent is one who sells works for authors at a commission. The popular idea is that they sit comfortably in their office while authors toil to supply them with material. I confess that I shared this vision, but I was soon undeceived. I worked like a nigger and with but little result. In any case there is nothing more ungrateful than a struggling author except perhaps the successful one! Then there is the continual drain upon your store of diplomacy and tact and sympathy, for which you get no percentage whatsoever, endless interviews: dreary ones with humorous writers (unconsciously) funny ones with the would-be great thinkers of our time; and amazing exhibitions of conceit on the part of people who came to me because, although they never found the slight-

est difficulty in getting rid of their work (I suppose in the wastepaper basket) they did not feel up to dealing with the business side of the question. Well the editors and publishers seemed to find no difficulty about that; at least to judge from the grimy and battered condition of the manuscripts. I inspired universal confidence, and having kept my eyes open in the Libraries, etc., I really knew where to shoot the rubbish.

“Of course I dealt mostly with the small fry; indeed well-known authors did not suit me so well. My idea was to catch an amenable and promising young writer and float him, so to speak, moulding him into a paying concern. At last he came! One day a young man entered the office carrying a parcel which he slapped down upon the table. How had he heard of me? Oh, I advertised in *Exchange and Mart* and all the other literary papers. He began speaking about aspirations and art, so I cut him short and said that I should be glad to know if these paid. He made a grimace and showed me his frayed cuffs and patched boots. After he had left I read through his MSS. He had undoubted talent — and he wrote good English; pure waste of time.

“At our next interview, with perfect frankness, I explained my plan for turning him into a paying concern to the best of my abilities and for our mutual benefit. We drew up an agreement: which was naturally rather in the nature of counting unhatched

chickens, but I love a sporting risk. There came a knock at the door. 'Excuse me,' I said, 'that must be Rudyard Kipling. Stay here while I go and talk to him in the other office.'

"Was it Kipling?" asked Melton breathlessly.

"Not exactly," she replied. "You are a business man yourself, and so you must realise that one cannot distinguish between every individual knock. As a matter of fact it was the man about the rent. Our conversation was brief and I returned to my client. When I sketched out my programme he was inclined to demur: he had literary ideals as I said before. However, he was at length persuaded to put these to sleep for a while. Once he had commanded a sale (of course I called it 'making a name' to him) he could wake up the ideals. The British Public will accept anything from any one they know well. Then I got him a place as waiter; the kind of waiter who is engaged for ball suppers and parties. I worked him very hard: he had to write down an account of every evening, find out the names of the people he described, and glean as much about their personalities as possible. How he hated shaving off his moustache! By the end of the season he was worn out, but he had fulfilled all my expectations and I had a whole collection of his thumbnail, or rather shirt cuff, descriptions written in a vivid conversational style, wherein I detected a slight glimmering of humour, which, of course, I instantly

suppressed. Nothing is more dangerous to a beginner.

"He was not naturally fond of scandal but I made him listen to all the gossip — nothing goes on in London without waiters becoming aware of it long before any one else. In fact, if people only knew what this well-informed and discreet race see and hear, the London season would come to an abrupt end! Then I told him that he could grow his moustache and write his novel. (Both were ready by Christmas.) You never saw such a success as *May-fair under a Microscope*. The book was so amusing that several of the reviewers really read it! One in the Literary Supplement of our chief oracle said, 'Terence Northallerton has leapt into fame, not only as a brilliant novelist, but as a masterly exponent of Eugenics.'"

"What are Eugenics?" interrupted Melton.

"Something to do with Sandow," she replied promptly, and went on,—"Not for many years have we seen London Society so faithfully portrayed; with so light and yet firm a touch. The author speaks with authority — his book is a revelation; and if at times it be a daring and unpleasant revelation (witness the chapter on the Dangers of Décolletage) yet this is unavoidable. We must be prepared to face reality. We are apt to muzzle the daring spirit who stretches out his hand to kick down the great social questions that threaten us. We are confronted with

deep, immeasurable pools of iniquity which envelop us in their toils, and we are content to live, wrapping our heads in cotton wool like the ostrich, instead of boldly setting out to cross them in hobnailed boots and oaken staff as John Bunyan of blessed memory.'

" 'Here,' said another, 'here have we Mayfair under the microscope with a vengeance. It is an open secret that the Author is a well-known figure in Society and holds the *entrée* to the most exclusive circles.' I spread about that he was free from all narrow-mindedness and prejudice in the best sense of the word, and that he was equally at home in Bohemian and Court Circles (which was true). Meanwhile, having photographed him boating (on the Serpentine) and motoring — (you know that, at the Olympic Show, if you only look at a motor they send you out for a trial drive; and it is really a kindness to the poor thing, cooped up there all day long) — I was ready to write the Illustrated Interview, just at the right moment.

"Of course you have no time for reading, but you simply cannot imagine Terence N.'s success. Everybody bought the book because it got about that all the characters were portraits, and commissions simply poured in upon the author who is kept as busy as a very highly paid bee. Indeed, I believe that his essay on 'Altruistic Apiaries' appears next week. Although he keeps to novels as a rule, articles and essays come in usefully sometimes: for instance, now that

he is building a new palm lounge at his castle in the Highlands: the one which stands in the middle of a dense deer forest. That is why he wrote, 'Alimony and subconscious Ideals.' "

"Are those the ideals you spoke about?" asked Melton.

"Yes, they are subconscious because they are still fast asleep! He has not found it financially worth while to try and wake them. It will be time enough for that if the fashion changes. Meanwhile, they are too expensive. One must not grumble: my investment paid — and he is now at the top of the tree to judge from results. I decided not to marry him because he has put on weight and besides (other people say it is a charming touch of originality but *I* call it simply vulgar) he will wear a pink (hunt) coat out shooting." She stopped, for in the distance the melodious sound of the hotel gong smote upon her ear.

"Really, Froggy," it was the youth whom we met at the beginning of this fantasy. "I think that you are failing to play the game. That young Oyster has fallen in love with you."

"Well, and what then?"

They were speeding along the high road in a motor which he was driving.

"Oh, well," he replied, foolishly enough — and then broke off, rather flushed.

The young woman kept silence for a minute or

two — contrary to her habit. The wind caught her long motor veil, swathing her face and neck until she looked like a very pretty nun. Suddenly she turned towards him and her eyes sparkled with anger.

"Men are so unmerciful," she exclaimed. "Yes, I am a little fool who works for a Biograph Company, and lives in the provinces, and has never been to London except on a cheap excursion, and my father was a publisher who went broke, and I am married to a brute who drinks, and my nerves broke down so that I had to come to the sea for a rest. Oh yes, I know all that, just as well as I know that I go back to the treadmill at the end of this: it is all I am fit for. But if you had more imagination than a clod you would realise what fun it is to drop the whole thing for a little, to forget the grind, and imagine that one is a real person with real adventures, and not a shabby little creature playing shadowy parts for Cinemas! I have done that nice baby no harm; we both wanted to get out of our grooves, although neither of us will ever get right out of them into the real world. We shall only peep over the edge. Perhaps we have neither of us the courage — we are doomed to flatten our noses against the windows while other people have all the fun outside, and somehow we never have the nerve to open those windows and jump out — or else perhaps it is too much trouble to go round by the door: we will always see life second-hand."

Some strands of her curly hair blew into her eyes, or so she said, as she rubbed them fiercely with an absurdly small handkerchief. However, she was able to see the next post office for she stopped the motor and got down — leaving her companion still dazed by such an unexpected outburst.

“Is that to say goodbye?” he asked with complete want of tact when she returned after sending a telegram.

“If you must know it was to tell the manager that I am going away to-night. The hotel is getting too full of golfers to be amusing.”

Her companion frowned — he was favourite in the great match that was to begin next day in the neighbourhood.

Upon their return his temper was not improved by the news that she was dining at Melton Mohair’s little table and going away immediately afterwards. The hotel manager bore the news of her departure with equanimity.

“In fact it will fit in rather well,” he remarked frankly, “as we are so short of room.” And he showed her a telegram. It was from the Prime Minister of the moment, announcing that he and the Leader of the Opposition, both persevering golfers, were arriving for the competition. “Not that they can enter at this time of day,” he observed. “They arrive by the train which gets in at 9.45 to-night,—

just after you leave. Rather a pity, Madam — you will just miss seeing them."

"Cruel luck," agreed the young lady, and retired to change for dinner.

Melton awaited her with a feverish impatience. She looked at him rather nervously: across his honest round face, now becomingly sunburnt the words "Proposal of Marriage" loomed, and her heart sank within her — so that she began immediately to stave off the crisis with her habitual energy.

"Mr. Mohair," she began, confidentially leaning across the table. "I think that I have been rather silly to pour all these confidences into your sympathetic ear. You see I was very badly brought up. I don't think I told you that my father was a Mormon?" Allowing this to sink in, she continued, "That is why my grandfather never even regretted me when he saw the news of my supposed fate in the papers. There were so many of us, and that is why I made a definite vow never to marry. I have seen too much of family life; what with nineteen brothers and twenty-two sisters, forty aunts, dozens of uncles, and, as to cousins, well, I was never quick enough at compound multiplication to get at their constantly increasing census. Anyhow, they would make a nice cluster of in-laws to hang round my husband. And they are all so full of family feeling — nothing shakes them off; they would stick like burrs," and glancing

at Melton she observed that her remedy was working.

"Of course every one realises now that I am a confirmed celibate, but you are the only one who know about the Mormonism. Of course I felt very sad sometimes. I would be feeling lonely and depressed, and a flashlight photograph would arrive of the family circle at Christmas. My father by the Christmas tree, in the middle of a large crowd (only near relations of course) and all round like a hedge — the bassinettes in a big circle. Father has to hang five hundred presents on that tree, and even then there is a good deal of feeling; he can't remember all his family, poor dear! It takes him three weeks to fill up the Census. The recollection of this unpleasantness has always been a comfort to me in my solitude: they are all so devoted and yet wrangling, arguing, and nagging from morning to night.

"I have got on in life. After my success about Terence N.'s career, I became known as his Literary Adviser (although the nature of that advice was kept secret by us both), and was enabled to give up any further notion of money making. People asked me everywhere — I was consulted upon all sorts of subjects — in confidence. And this brings me to the reason why I have to leave to-night."

"To-night!" echoed Melton, and she did not care to meet his eyes.

"Yes. My decision to leave was taken suddenly

and quite against my will, in fact only this afternoon. (By the by I did not go out with you to-day, because, although I am a confirmed celibate, we have been so much together lately, and you City men have to be so careful.) When I came back I heard that the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition are coming here to-night for the Golf competition; arriving at 9.45. Now — I seem fated to make you the most extraordinary confidences — nobody knows that I am the intimate friend of both these personages — least of all themselves. Oh dear! how badly I express myself! What I mean is that every evening at 6 the Prime Minister comes to talk over the questions of the day with me in my London house; quite unconscious of the fact that the Leader of the Opposition arrives for precisely the same purpose at 7. Oddly enough they both say that it is of the utmost value to them to talk to some one who has absolutely no political views."

"Isn't it rather wearing?" asked Melton, and she saw that in his humble mind she had already receded from a close, delightful possibility as a wife, into a dazzling but intangible vision. They were still sitting at the little table to the outward eye, but really they had moved immensely far apart; so far that it seemed as if she would have to raise her voice to reach him.

Have you ever held some object in your hand for a few minutes over a window sill — and then re-

solved to open that hand and slowly and deliberately to let that object go? You will say that this is simple enough, but it is not quite so easy as you imagine — even if it is something that you did not think you cared twopence about. Well, if you have done this, you will not wonder why it took the girl a few minutes before she was able to answer lightly.

“Oh yes, until I had a good idea: I told the Prime Minister that he must always give me until the next day to look at his arguments from every point of view; as they were too clever to answer at once. Then, the following evening, having gleaned the ideas of his rival, I confronted him with these — and *vice versa*. It is like Cup and Ball — not a bit tiring.

“Only they are both coming here to-night, they fraternise over golf. So they must not see me. The cat would get out of the bag if we were all cooped up together in this little hotel.”

As she spoke the door opened and both politicians, having managed to escape from London by an earlier train, entered the restaurant together. Melton noticed that she looked rather taken aback, but only for a moment, then, leaning forward she whispered in his ear. “Of course my political influence is a secret, so they *never* recognise me in public.”

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